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A Novel

BY

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/

AUTHOR OF

'SAID THE FISHERMAN'



Westminster

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

WITH an emotion inconceivable by townsmen, the village of Ditchley on a fine September afternoon witnessed the passage of an open carriage, drawn at the full trot of a pair of high-stepping greys, and containing a gentleman and a lady.

The male occupant was instantly identified as Mr. Glover, the new landlord, of whose antecedents as a tradesman there were whisperings. In his companion some saw a governess, though her languid ease hardly tallied with dependence. But the certainty that Mr. Glover was a widower, with two daughters on the brink of womanhood, coloured the supposition of a governess.

It was four o'clock, an hour when able men were not at home to gape at the vision. Only a few old toothless gaffers were there, leaning on garden gates, who pulled their forelocks. But the women flew to each cottage-door, dropping courtesies through late hollyhocks and sunflowers to the fine equipage, whose owner bowed graciously in return. And the children were just streaming noisily out of school, so Ditchley was not altogether voiceless on that great day.

The youngsters, hushed through awe of the approaching splendour, formed hedges to let it pass. The reverence of the little girls took the shape of an abortive attempt to sit down; the little boys touched their foreheads and flourished their hands to the gentry, throwing the palms outward. Some of the smallest pressed sleeves to brows as if to screen their eyes from an unbearable radiance. One lad, moved to

enthusiasm, bawled 'Hooray !' and the cry was taken up by the whole swarm. It paralysed the mistress, rushing out to scold and silence them, to see the gentleman turn his head, bow and smile, evidently gratified.

The landau bowled on its way, driving hens a-cluck to either hedge, with a few of the imps running in its wake of dust, and cheering madly. A turn of the road snatched it from sight ; but presently an urchin tore back, dusty and breathless, to tell how it had turned in at the vicarage drive. The news passed by shouts from gate to gate up the whole line of gardens till it reached Lottie Heaviland, who dwelt in the end cottage and had been first to spy the carriage—a fact recalled concerning her in Ditchley to this day with awe-stricken shaking of heads, seeing Providence had a finger in it.

There was something quietly but confidently feminine about Lottie, which even at that age drew men's eyes to her with abashment as to a lady. Sunday or weekday her clothes simply sheathed her, while in the case of other girls not worse-favoured they were a positive disfigurement. At school small boys had so far forgotten their scorn of petticoats as to court her on the sly with cob-nuts, marbles or russet apples in their season—all fruits of the earth that may bulge a breeches-pocket. She had refused such tribute with a wry face ; it smelt of corduroy, she said ; but she had kept the suitors dangling at a respectful distance, and, now that school was a memory and those admirers were pipe-smoking hobbledehoys, any one of them would have run a mile with rapture at her bidding.

The shadow of the rise behind the village, surmounted by a windmill, was beginning to trespass on the level ; that of the cottage stretched almost to the gate on which the girl leaned in her pink cotton dress, gazing forth abstractedly over marshes from which the aftermath had ere that been carted, leaving them smooth as a bowling-green to the eye except where the reeds and sedges along some ditch cropped up like a sunken hedge. A few poplars and willows showed

feathery in the softening light, which, now that evening drew on, seemed to hold gold dust in suspension. A window gleamed in Hedgeham All Saints on the yonder side, whose russet cottages with the wooded knoll beyond had been Lottie's childish conception of a distant shore.

She was looking at some cattle in the nearest meadow, divided from the road only by a low hedge, though scarcely considering them. White and red and dun were in the herd, and some with dun heads and tails and white backs a little streaked and spotted. They stood or lay quite still, the whole body seeming flaccid as the udders; only jaws munching, tails swishing, and great, dreamy eyes told of life. They symbolised her existence hitherto; her future also if she remained in Ditchley.

All at once a woman on the look-out cried, and another answered. Lottie stretched over the gate and beheld all the matrons and maids craning likewise. A woman-servant from the parsonage was hurrying up the road in black dress and white apron, clearly despatched in haste with no time but to pin on a hat. A dozen voices pleaded for news, but the maid sped on unbeguiled, though with added consequence.

'The Reverend Freely's compliments to you, Lottie Heaviland, and will you get yourself tidy and step up to the vicarage with me at once!'

Not many minutes later Lottie glided down the road by the housemaid's side, an object of awe to many pairs of eyes. To honour so rare an occasion she was coaxing on her only pair of kid gloves. It was remarked that she looked quite the lady, such self-possession incurring censure as ill-becoming her age and station.

Anything relative to the new family at the Abbey was food for curiosity greedily devoured in Ditchley. The great house lay on the upland aloof from the village and its doings, shrouded moreover from popular knowledge in a park and wide woods of sacred privacy. Two years since, a sale by auction of movables appertaining to a spendthrift whose race had held the place for more than a century had laid

the mansion open to an irruption like that of the Paris mob into the Tuileries. But that was only a memory, an interlude; with the coming of a purchaser the Abbey regained prestige.

A crowd gathered at her mother's gate, burning to question Lottie when she came back from the vicarage. It seeming in the nature of things that she who had been the show-pupil of the village school should be offered to visitors as a sample of what Ditchley could produce, no one suspected she had been summoned to any other end than a cursory inspection. Her statement on her return that she was engaged, subject to parental approval, as lady's-maid to the younger Miss Glover fell like a bomb among the assembled gossips, exploding in incredulity, wonder, and envious congratulation. The girl's unflushed calm rebuked the surrounding excitement. She answered the questions of those nearest.

'The lady spoke to me all the while. . . . No, she ain't the governess but a great lady, the Honourable Mrs. Garland, who gets I don't know how much a year to bring up the Miss Glovers to be real ladies. 'Twas Mary at the vicarage told me. . . . Miss Enid—that's the name of my young lady—she's seventeen, same as me. The other, which wears her hair up, is called Miss Ruth. By what they say Mr. Glover's not a gentleman born, and the real gentry such as Squire Calderon o' Hamford fight kind o' shy of him for all he's so rich, though Sir Charles Vellum o' Hilton stands his friend. But the young ladies, they say, be real ladies and behave wonderful nice in company.'

Upon the whole the amazed chorus acclaimed the maiden, her preferment promising to put the Abbey in gossiping touch with the village. Her parents sanctioned her step up from them with humble thanksgiving. But one voice rasped, a brother's, croaking of the perils run by a girl of her charm in the service of gentlefolk. Her father silenced the raven with a cry of 'Shame!'

'Wa, Chris bo', yow couldn't ha' said more nor plainer gen

yer sister was a-goin' to wait on a young gen'l'm'n 'stead of a gel like herself.'

Lottie was mortified by this one refusal to congratulate her. It spoilt her last evening at home. Yet it was that same brother, Christmas Heaviland, who begged an afternoon off to drive her to the Abbey in a gig furnished gratis by the blacksmith.

'Lottie,' he said meekly as they jogged along, 'I be wholly sorry I did speak so yesternight.'

'Are you, Chris?'

'Yow 'll be a good gel, 'ont ye, dear? And if so be as any one dew ever threaten harm to ye, yow 'll call to mind yow got a brother—eh, Lottie?'

'Yes, Chris, that I will. But what thoughts you do have ; 'tis wholly dreadful.'

The drive was accomplished under rain. The need of holding up an umbrella to preserve her best hat, and the trammels of a waterproof, kept Lottie's fancy in prosaic jesses. The circle of the horizon, narrowed by the down-pour, moved along with them over the fields—a ring like the moon's, of grey mist coldly luminous, of which the trap and its occupants were always the centre. The approach of gloomy woods forming slowly out of the haze daunted the girl with apprehensions of the life beyond them. They found the park gates shut ; but a little old man came tripping out of the adjacent lodge whose plastered walls stood in relation to its roof of thatch as stem to mushroom.

'Business up at the 'ouse?' he inquired of the driver while making the pompous iron-work ring on its hinges. 'Oh, ah! Miss Eny's new maid. Well, I 'ope you'll suit, Miss. You might mention as old Tom Anthony which have known her from a babe, and Mrs. Anthony what go by the name o' Martha, 'ope she 'asn't forgot 'em. There's three days we 'aven't seen her, though Miss Ruth did look in yesterday. . . . But I must cut in out of the wet.'

He spoke with that glibness of the townsman which is in itself impressive to the yokel breed. Christmas raised the

whip to his hat ere applying it to the pony ; while with a nod the old fellow trotted back to his lodge which rose out of smooth grass in the drip and shadow of big trees like a huge, grey toadstool.

The wall of woods closed behind them as pony and gig jogged along a smooth drive, traversing pastures dotted with timber which the rain obscured. The Glovers could not, Christmas contended, be altogether the upstarts rumour painted them, seeing that lodgekeeper had been for years in their employ. But Lottie, though seeming to hearken, did not heed. Her thoughts were all on the Abbey of which she began to catch glimpses through the trees. The many-windowed front, unmasked of a sudden, seemed a battery about to open fire on her.

Her spirits reached their nadir when Chris pulled up at the tradesmen's entrance and a lackey in his shirt-sleeves scrutinised her with condescension from the doorstep. 'Mind and be a good gel !' her brother enjoined at parting.

She was presented to a stout, elderly woman of great majesty, whose dignified welcome made her feel extraordinarily small and inadequate. Acceptance of the offer of a cup of tea after her drive was prevented by the bawl of a flunkey : 'Miss Enid wants the new gal took straight to her sittin'-room when she comes.' After introduction to her bedroom, Lottie in shivering dejection followed the maid told off to conduct her. They threaded long passages and crossed wide landings, their footfall muffled by soft carpets, till the guide knocked at a door.

'Come in !' said a voice.

As the door closed again a girl rose from an arm-chair beside a cheery fire. To Lottie's bashful vision the young lady towered indefinitely.

'So you are Lottie Heaviland ! let me have a good look at you. We must be great friends. . . . I thought you would like to have tea with me here on the first day. You've seen your room ? It's the little one next to mine. Morley, my sister's maid, will give you lessons in hair-dress-

ing and other things you'll want to know. Mrs. Garland says I mustn't wear my hair down any longer, so I suppose it must go up; everything Mrs. Garland says is done in this house.'

She held out a chestnut tail for Lottie's inspection, who, rapidly picturing its loosed volume, saw there a beauty to rival the dark eyes of its owner, which it took her time to discover were of a rare deep blue.

'I had the fire lighted because it's such a horrid day. I hope you won't find it too much.'

Overwhelmed by the unlooked-for warmth enveloping her, and not far from tears, Lottie murmured, 'I'm sure it's most kind of you, miss.'

They were at tea when Ruth Glover, a flaxen-haired young woman, very grandly dressed, with eyes like a doll's of forget-me-not blue and a somewhat peevish mouth, burst in on them and began scolding Enid for carrying off the new maid before Mrs. Garland had seen and spoken to her.

'She has just found out where this girl is, and she looks like thunder, I can tell you. I thought I'd warn you. She'll be here in a minute, and you'll catch it. I wish Lord Elmsdale was still here to defend us. You know how he stood up for me yesterday. She looked quite relieved when he went off this morning. You'd think she'd miss her own brother. I'm sure there's something queer about her if I could only find out: she never speaks of her husband. I don't believe she was ever married. . . . Well, I've warned you. I don't think there ever was any one quite so silly as you are, Enid.'

'But papa said I might have her all to myself, for my very own maid, to do what I liked with.'

'A lot she cares! Besides I know papa didn't mean it like that.' Ruth went out again with a twirl of her skirt, so disturbing to the whole atmosphere of the little boudoir that the fire puffed smoke into the room.

'Sit down, Lottie,' said Enid in the manner of a sovereign

protectress. She herself remained upright, hand on hip, looking out of the window at a rain-dimmed stretch of park. At a tap on the door she turned sharp round to face it, bidding enter.

In contradiction of Ruth's forecast, Mrs. Garland proved all motherly. A tall woman of generous build, her age debatable between thirty and forty, she was still indisputably good-looking despite a prominent nose and rather high cheekbones. Her manner of sailing in subjugated Lottie. Enid's flush and the challenge in her eyes governed the tactics of the ruling lady.

'Why, how cosy you are! May I sit down, Enid? What a bright idea to have a fire! If I had guessed there was tea going up here I should certainly have claimed your hospitality. I did not even know that Charlotte had arrived till Bennet told me just now.'

Even froward Enid was obliged to express contrition.

'I'm sorry I forgot to send her to you. But papa said she was to be my very own——'

Mrs. Garland took the penitent's hand and stroked it fondly. 'Don't give it another thought, my dear child! Of course she is to be your own maid. But I really doubt'—her eyes smiled into Enid's—'whether you could give her accurate instruction in a lady's-maid's duties. Now, could you?'

Enid laughed, quite won over; and her tamer presently sailed out with Lottie in train.

Though engaged by Simon Glover to chaperon his daughters and be their pattern in the social arts and graces, Mrs. Garland had, by her genius for organisation in a household much needing supervision, risen in a few months to be virtual mistress of the Abbey. Instances of her wisdom and grasp of the proprieties were constantly occurring to confirm her employer in his reliance on her sagacity in all matters not purely of business. Moreover, the name of her brother, Lord Elmsdale, looked well in the list of guests at Ditchley Abbey which the local paper liked to print in the

shooting season; and the county families were perceptibly less averse to traffic with the mansion when she was understood to be practical hostess there.

Her rule was beneficent and kindly, though the girls, accustomed to a meek governess, were apt to resent it as a tyranny. In her utmost friendliness there was yet a breath of conventionality, tantamount to distance, which inclined them to believe her false. Enid in particular had imbibed a prejudice against the chaperon from her old nurse Martha Anthony, who with Thomas her husband had been removed at her instigation to the thatched lodge, a banishment which rankled in the old woman's breast. The couple had served Simon Glover through less prosperous times, and on the surface of things it seemed hard that they should be thrust aside in the day of his splendour. But Mrs. Garland had good reasons for weeding them out. In the house they had been a mere encumbrance, and ungainly to boot. At the lodge they were of some use and did not clash so much with their environment.

At the first the great house struck Lottie as a complete world apart from that she had before inhabited. She was awed by the long corridors, so thickly carpeted that the clumsiest step fell muffled, pervaded by a chastened gloom, which gave to faces there encountered the paleness of alabaster, and invested forms and features with that indefinable softness of mystery we admire in old woodcuts. It was with a qualm of surprise, when passing one of the deep-set windows, that she beheld the belt of woodland confining the park, and realised that not far beyond those trees lay Ditchley and the marshes and the blue rise of Hedgeham All Saints.

Mrs. Garland, Miss Ruth and the servants called her Charlotte; with her mistress she was always Lottie. Her devotion to that mistress grew impassioned. Never was she so happy as when combing out the heavy chestnut mane or called into consultation as to what dress Miss Enid should wear on an occasion. The assiduities of the serving-men

barely gratified her. Personal vanity swooned a while, tranced in the first true love she had ever known.

Of Mr. Glover she saw next to nothing, only hearing his voice in the house and catching occasional glimpses of his bent grey head and square shoulders. The servants spoke much of his wealth, and Enid sometimes referred fretfully to his love of money, which, having never known the want of it, she herself affected to scorn. Lottie thought of him with a reverence tinged with dread, as one working, it might be nefariously, behind a veil.

Enid had yearnings for the open air which her morning promenade on horseback by no means exhausted. She would obtain Mrs. Garland's leave to take Lottie for her companion in the afternoon on walks through the park and the adjacent country; greatly preferring such free rambles to the alternative state drive with the chaperon and Ruth, the latter of whom held the country mere setting for the country-house. She loved the still evenings in that flat region, when the immensity of sky was felt as a presence, and weed-fires in the fields twined bluish columns heavenwards like the smoke of burnt sacrifice. Sunset played high in the west, a geyser of flame, showering on the prostrate earth rays that burned with the many colours of a witch's fire; and Enid would stand hushed and at poise, as one fain of sweet music, her clutch of Lottie's arm exhorting her too to wonder. The world was no more than a warmed hearth-stone, they twain but basking insects.

Sometimes they would take tea with Mrs. Anthony at the thatched lodge, of whose heart Enid was acknowledged queen. At the latter's eager suggestion they even sped to the village one tawny November day, and there burst in on Mrs. Heaviland kneading dough, who knew not what to do or say. But Mrs. Garland, coming to hear of that exploit, remonstrated so gravely with Lottie that the maid wept as she promised amendment.

One wintry morning Enid came in as usual pink-cheeked and fragrant from her ride. Ruth keeping her room with a

cold, she had taken her appointed exercise without other company than that of the belted groom prancing in her wake. Her maid, who never missed an opportunity of being alone with her, was at hand to divest her of her habit.

Sitting down on the edge of a chair, she fell to tapping her boot with the crop which by inadvertence she still carried.

‘Lottie, do you know any one of the name of Boyne about here?’

‘No, Miss; that I don’t. But stay—There is Mr. Sidney Boyne of Hedgeham St. Mary, him they call the Hermit. Very clever, they say, and has written a book.’

‘That must be the one. It was on the Hedgeham Road, just past the turn to your village. Miles called out to me that Robin had cast a shoe, so I sent him back to your blacksmith friend and rode on slowly. All at once Fairy shied at something in the hedge and started dancing, and I dropped my whip and a gentleman picked it up for me and patted poor Fairy and stood talking till Miles reappeared. He says he has often seen me walking and riding, and wondered who I was.’

Lottie looked incredulous. ‘He could easy have found out if he’d wanted. Every one in the Hedgehams knows you by this time. They say he’s poor for a gentleman. He keeps just a woman and her husband to do for him by what I’ve heard.’

‘What’s money!’ breathed Enid between a sigh and a yawn.

CHAPTER II

THE HERMIT OF HEDGEHAM ST. MARY

BUT three miles and a half as the crow flies, though nearly twice that distance by road, from Ditchley Abbey, beyond the marshes with their whispering poplars, the village of Hedgeham St. Mary dotted a bleak stretch of upland. Its cottages, widely spaced and lone-looking, straggled beside the old highway of the district, still for distinction called the turnpike. There was no huddling or nestling together, no suggestion of fellowship, but each building held churlishly aloof as if suspicious of its neighbours.

Here no trees plumed the hedgerows, and such as grew in the cottage-gardens and thin orchards looked weather-beaten and distorted; while the hedges themselves were cut too low to arrest the gaze, which roamed at large over a dull-hued patchwork of tilled fields, eventually as irritating to the beholder as prolonged contemplation of the pattern on a carpet. Church and parsonage lay out of sight in the sheltered dale, which, far from relieving the monotony by its undulation, appeared but as a dint in a flat surface. Woods everywhere along the skyline only underlined the besetting bareness. All along that dreary reach of road, the wind in the telegraph-wires moaned of sympathy with the way-farer.

Two fields back from the highway, towards which it stared over cropped hedges, stood a cottage more pretensions than the rest, borrowing from adjacent out-buildings and a walled garden an air of substantial independence if not of comfort. Some half-grown Scotch firs, planted for a

shield against the salt east-wind, blustering lord of that country, drew the eye to it as to an oasis.

‘There’s where our hermit live. He be a rum ’un, and no mistake!’ villagers would remark at pointing out the house to a stranger. Then details would be given of the tenant’s odd way of life. How, though quite a young gentleman, he could read foreign tongues as easily as simple men say prayers, and cared for nought upon earth, it was said, beside his books and his writing; how he never went to church or ale-house, thus ignoring the duty he owed both to God and his neighbour; how he never spoke willingly to any man, but took lonely walks, swinging his stick and looking half-dazed, and was just as likely to scowl as smile if one touched a forelock. Dwellers in St. Mary’s parish felt a certain pride in retailing all this to outsiders; but among themselves they had long ceased to exclaim over the eccentricities of Mr. Sidney Boyne.

That very quality of bleakness in the landscape which repelled others constituted its attraction for Boyne. When his mother’s death removed the last check on his brooding propensities, leaving him with means that allowed of his indulging them comfortably, he had hired this prosaic hermitage and retired hither to a perpetual warm bath of melancholy, relaxing to every manly fibre. He loved on winter’s nights to lounge in a deep arm-chair beside a glowing fire and ruminate his own sadness, while wolf-howls of the wind around his drear abode made fitting music, a dirge for his thwarted life.

He had relatives in the neighbourhood; no less a worthy than Sir Charles Vellum, Baronet, of Hilton Hall, being his first cousin once removed. He could, had he chosen, have frequented the great houses of the district. But intense shyness and a burning diffidence had stiffened his response to friendly overtures, and in the end his cousins tired of one-sided civilities. By degrees they forgot his existence so near at hand. He was left alone through his own fault, in accordance with his own wish, for he told himself that he

craved but solitude. Yet this very isolation, for which he had wrought, furnished an additional theme for his melancholy musings, further evidence in support of the bitter-sweet private conviction that he was in truth one of those strange beings, gifted but all unblest, who, stricken, give forth music, and leave a soul's cry ringing after them through the ages to haunt posterity.

To the elderly couple who served him he remained now, after three years' service, the same 'cure,' otherwise enigma, they had pronounced him at first sight. Sometimes, for weeks together, Mr. Boyne would be taciturn with his domestics, and then all at once would make much of them, taking them into his confidence as friends and equals.

'Poor dear, he's wearin'.' He ain't quite like other folks and we has to humour him,' they would sigh, with significant tapping of foreheads. But grumble though they might to inquisitive tradespeople and neighbours, it was clear that the pair did not greatly pity themselves, for they remained in his service; and it was whispered in the village that they were making an excellent thing out of the poor young gentleman.

Meanwhile the hermit himself, between his pipe and his books, had enjoyed a grievous kind of contentment until the hour when he first met Enid. The abstract idea of a woman who should one day rest his head on her consoling breast had hovered near him without troubling; a phantom as abstruse as the muse of ancient poets, and serving the same purpose as a lay-figure to his art. He had dreamed of a pale, pensive brow, sad eyes, and a sweet mouth drawn with pain. Having felt generally repelled by the robust, he professed to despise health. Yet he found himself dazzled by a beauty it was impossible to dissociate from health—a young girl's charm of beauty, that owed nothing to experience, but sang of keen joy in the bare fact of existence.

A trifling courtesy, the picking up of the whip she had dropped, had won him blushing thanks and a kind glance

from eyes deep blue as a shadowed sea. For five golden minutes her friendliness had dispelled his shyness, had set him a man among men. Then she had disappeared, leaving him restless, his brain a turmoil of strange thoughts.

The cloud in which he loved to dwell was rent and flying. Darts of pitiless light traversed the old gloom. That which in the mist had passed for a demi-god seemed a scarecrow in the light. Some old well of self-complacency had suddenly run dry within him, some new spring of yearning gushed forth in its stead. He found himself adoring the accidents of health and youth, bitterly ashamed of that physical inferiority in which he had hitherto gloried as the robe of genius. Hankering to be as other men were, yet battling with this new ambition as with a weakness, he grew unsettled, restless. His self-conceit moaned writhing, transfixed with a dart. He began to take thought for his appearance, had recourse to a tailor, and abjured the agricultural labourer's practice of shaving but twice a week which he had adopted through sheer listlessness.

Sidney Boyne was no schemer. His bemused wits were incapable of plot or calculation. The patience which can investigate causes, and mitigate emotion by reducing it to the first prosaic factor, had never been his. All that befell him partook of the encircling mystery. Every coincidence was a miracle for or against him. Every accident fell straight from the hand of that ironical power which pushed him hither and thither, entranced or dejected him, for its own inscrutable ends. In short, he was profoundly, abjectly superstitious.

That he should ever have been granted an opportunity of acquaintance with the lovely girl, a fleeting glimpse of whom had once or twice disturbed the reverie of his walks abroad, was wonderful enough in itself: that he should have had the presence of mind to avail himself of that opportunity when it occurred, was a prodigy without parallel in his self-experience. He had been inspired, or so it appeared to him looking back. Fate had suddenly empowered him

to perform gracefully one of those common acts of politeness it was his native infirmity to bungle. Such miracles, he reasoned—if that can be called reasoning which was so near a dream—such miracles do not happen for nought. The adventure could not end there whether for good or ill. It had significance ; something must assuredly come of it. But he had begun to doubt the hypothesis of a ruling Providence in the matter—a Providence which for three long weeks had withheld the further sign he courted and prayed for—ere a second and yet more wonderful encounter came to justify him in the perception of a shaping hand.

For three weeks of that hard winter he haunted the Ditchley side of the marshes, with care only to avoid houses. Wrapped in an ulster, he explored each lane and footpath on the tableland between the village and the Abbey at his wonted saunter. He perched on stiles or gates commanding a likely stretch of road until his limbs grew numb, and he had to stamp on the ground and slap his chest to restore circulation. But in vain. Once he met a closed carriage issuing from the park gates, and that was all. It was drawn by a pair of horses, and bore on the box two men in a smart livery, part concealed by the fur capes both wore. It passed quite close to him, insolently unheeding, but he could not distinguish the occupants owing to the breath-mist on the frosty glass. That seemed a poor reward for his hours of hungry prowling, his prayers and neglect of food, his vows and cringing superstitious observances.

But his reward came at length. The longed-for meeting was vouchsafed to him upon a day when he wore a new suit of clothes for the first time, upon which also it began to thaw. To one or other of these incidents, rather than to his own perseverance, he ascribed his good luck. He remembered afterwards to have had a presentiment while putting on those clothes, at remarking that change in the weather.

He was sitting on a stile between two fields within view of Ditchley windmill, which stood motionless and ghostly white in the grey, damp air, when his lady came in sight

round a bend of the footpath, which in that place skirted a high and tangled hedge. She was not alone, but was talking and laughing with another girl of about her own age. The pair approached at the swinging pace a strict feminine censorship condemns as unladylike, which sufficiently betrayed their unconsciousness of his entranced gaze fixed on them.

Of a sudden they trod more demurely and their voices fell. They had caught sight of him. With brain a-swim he slid down off the rail and stood by in readiness to lift his hat. The hedgerows danced in mist before his eyes.

At his salute she stared vacantly for a moment ; then recognition brought a pleasant smile and she held out her hand.

‘Oh, how do you do? I could not think for the minute who it was!’

‘I hardly dared hope you would remember me,’ Boyne murmured. ‘It is so long since I had the pleasure of seeing you. You have not been riding lately or I should certainly have met you. I’m always about in these regions.’

‘I’ve been away for a fortnight, staying with Aunt Eliza at Lichfield. This is my maid, Lottie Heaviland.’

She named her aunt simply as if all the world must know the lady, and Boyne adored her simplicity. At introduction of her maid, he discerned a pretty girl blushing and making nervous play with her hands, to whom he bowed absently. She appeared to him the merest accessory, a barely relevant detail of the scene.

He begged for leave to walk with them a little way, and Enid granted it freely. The landscape grew once more distinct before his eyes, his brain cleared, his heart beat less loudly though with a new elation.

Over ploughed fields, still piebald with unmelted snow, a few crows and sea-gulls flew with sad cries. The land faded in steam. No breath ruffled the mat of discoloured grass along the foot of the hedge. Woods were as blue cloud along the horizon. The thaw-haze was moist and almost warm, a still for rain. Here and there a holly uprose

with sleek, smoke-white stem and black foliage. It was the day to dispirit a man with the suggestion of toneless grief, of tears repressed. But to Boyne it excelled the Maytime for light and perfume.

‘It’s rather muddy, I’m afraid,’ he observed as they came upon a small quagmire. The very ardour of his desire to shine in her eyes benumbed his faculties, confining him to the obvious and commonplace, a waste of the precious minutes.

Enid laughed as she sprang across. They wore strong boots, she assured him, speaking for herself and her companion. These walks were her delight. It was so nice to escape for a while from the glare of the chaperon. Ruth, her sister, could not bear the country. She never went out on foot if she could help it. But for herself, she much preferred a good romp across country with Lottie to a pompous drive in the carriage with Mrs. Garland and Ruth. She sighed: ‘How hateful money makes everything! Papa used to be ever so much nicer when we were not so rich. But now there’s only fuss and ceremony, servants to prevent one doing anything. It’s a kind of doll’s life. Now don’t you think, Mr. Boyne, that poor people are ever so much nicer than rich?’

‘I don’t see it quite from your point of view,’ said Sidney, smiling. ‘I am poor myself; and it had always struck me that rich people had the best of things.’

‘Oh no indeed! There you’re quite wrong!’ said Enid eagerly. ‘If you knew how wretched it is at home! In old days it used to be jolly, but now. . . . There’s no fun at Christmas, or on our birthdays even, since we’ve got so rich!’ She eyed him as if his poverty had been a new grace. ‘Since you’re poor, I won’t tell Ruth about you, or papa either. They wouldn’t understand. You shall be my own private friend; will you?’

Would he! . . . He could not speak. Tears sprang to his eyes. The wide world shouted joy. He trod on rosy cloud to a pæan of all creation.

Blind with worship, uncritical as an idolater, he failed to discern the soul of the child transparent in all she said.

The girl Lottie, though walking behind, kept very close to them. Boyne felt her as a watchdog at his heels, with instinctive mistrust. The minute he was gone she would remonstrate with her mistress, he foresaw; and he feared the blight of common-sense, the frost of conventionality, for the kindness he had inspired in Enid, as yet too young, too delicate to endure an ordeal. Something telling him that if he could but win from his love a clear promise to meet him, nothing the maid could say afterwards would induce her to break it, he pleaded:

‘When shall I see you again? Give me an hour to look forward to!’

Enid said innocently: ‘I don’t know when to tell you. Lottie and I often get leave for a walk in the afternoons when it doesn’t rain.’

‘Well, I tell you what I shall do,’ cried Boyne. ‘I shall sit on that stile, where you found me just now, every afternoon till you come!’

‘All right!’ laughed Enid. ‘You’ll see me one day soon.’

Then began a new phase of existence for the hermit of Hedgeham St. Mary, one of extreme agitation, of constant and varying emotion. The supreme artist touched his shapeless, twilight life, and lo! it sprang to form and colour.

He had stood as one upon a mountain-top contemplating the cloud-floor, smooth, and cold, and grey, when all at once the sun shone forth and the cloud dispersed, flying from the peaks in streamers of amber and rose. Flushed height and blue abyss were revealed. He saw perils, and his hopes were dizzy as the mountain villages poised eyrie-like and sunlit between gulf and gulf. Yet withal he was glad with the joy of sunrise.

In old days he had sojourned among mountains, alone with that mother whose jealous, selfish love had made of him the morbid being he was. The Alps, the Pyrenees, the Apennines loomed in the background of his imaginings.

He had seen them again at their fairest in the white cloud-ranges with which spring and autumn wall the East Anglian plain.

He still dreamed, but his musing was no longer a lethargy. A dramatic spirit animated his phantom-world. He dashed off poems in a kind of frenzy, missing the old, calm pleasure in the fashioning. And it surprised him, on reading them over, to find these fragments superior to his careful work, possessed of some new and burning quality elusive as life itself.

‘You shall be my own private friend.’ . . . Enid redeemed her word. She met him always with the same frank comradeship, telling him of her interests and her worries, of her father, and Ruth, and Mrs. Garland.

Sometimes a remark of hers would perplex him in the memory: as when she once observed that she would like to pry into the inmost lives of all kinds of people, from the richest to the poorest, ‘like the moon.’ The beauty of the comparison struck him, and, as was his wont with her lightest word, he gave it a personal significance. Her serenity appropriated the simile, but its further application distressed him. Could it be that she but pried into his inmost life, while he worshipped, hypnotised by her rays? At length, after vain mental searching, he ventured one day to ask:

‘What suggested to you that beautiful likening of yourself to the moon? It has haunted me since.’

Enid’s answer was an amazed stare. She had completely forgotten the remark. He had to recall to her the occasion and context ere she exclaimed:

‘Oh, now I remember. I wasn’t comparing myself to the moon—really! I was only thinking of Andersen’s *Fairy Tales*—“What the Moon Saw,” you know.’

Boyne bowed his head. He did not know in the least, but he went home and unearthed an ancient copy of those tales in which he read till cockcrow. It delighted her to hear how he admired them; they opened new charmed ground on which to meet; and jealous of her bated breath,

her softened glance, Boyne wished he had been Hans Christian Andersen.

The clandestine nature of his intercourse with this maiden, joint-heiress with her sister to the wealth of the drapersquire, never troubled Sidney. He viewed Enid as a being hardly of this earth, one detached from all duty, all authority. She visited him as the moon Endymion. It never occurred to him that his worship might bear a dishonourable construction. But as time went on he conceived a slight misgiving derived from the very frankness of his lady which had at first enslaved him.

When asked to call him 'Sidney' she complied without demur, bidding him in return call her 'Enid,' it was less stilted. His impassioned glances met a friendly smile. She liked to hear him talk of foreign countries, saying how she longed to travel; but when he vowed that he would give his all for the delight of guiding her, for the rapture of one sweet tour, they two alone together, she agreed that it would be jolly; and his heart sank. It was plain that the proposition conjured up for her no vision of a honeymoon.

Her candour discomfited him. It defined and circumscribed their relation. Yearning as he did to clasp and hold her, it constrained, fettered him with the fear of a transgression which should ruin all. Innate superstition bade him await the opportunity, the fulness of time, her gracious pleasure. He dared risk no whit of happiness for terror of losing the whole. He remembered Psyche.

The maid, too, always assisted at their interviews, a presence precluding endearments. She appeared to have lost her first distrust of him, yet he still caught her eyeing him with curiosity, and occasionally, as he fancied, with slight contempt. That Lottie offered an enigma he could not solve. Her provoking prettiness, her ladylike air, seemed out of place in a servant. She belonged to his dream of Enid, as the thorn to the rose.

On an April evening of primrose light and violet cloud, as Boyne was escorting his beloved and the inevitable maid a

little way on their return towards the Abbey, Enid said casually :

‘We go to London next month for the season. Ruth is to be presented at court. She’s looking forward to all sorts of gaiety. She hopes to “see life” at last. Papa has taken a house in Grosvenor Place, and we’re to do all that has to be done in the way of amusement. I hate the thought of it. I’d much rather stay behind at Ditchley. Papa and Ruth think only of money and showing-off, and Mrs. G. is always finding fault for little things. However, it’s settled, I’m going.’

The world darkened suddenly. The evening twitter of birds turned a senseless din in his ears. She was going away—for months! . . . He had never imagined such a void as this confronting him. Touched by his sudden sadness, she said laughingly :

‘It’s only for two months. We shall soon meet again. And I shall have such lots to tell you.’

‘You will come back changed. You will have seen life!’ said Boyne, made bitter by a presentiment.

‘What rubbish! . . . And you are quoting Ruth, not me. I see life everywhere. And my only wish is to remain at Ditchley.’

He repented instantly of his sharpness, seeing it hurt her.

As they were crossing a lane from stile to stile, a gentleman rode by at a foot’s pace. He glanced at the group in passing, and at a little distance turned to look again. Boyne knew a moment’s apprehension.

‘Who’s that rude man?’ said Enid aloud.

Lottie, awestruck, murmured at her elbow : ‘It’s Squire Calderon from Hamford, Miss; a pleasant-spoken gentleman . . .’

‘He may be “pleasant-spoken,” as you call it, but he’s not a gentleman,’ Enid broke out vehemently. ‘I know about him. . . . Did I ever tell you, Sidney, how he insulted papa once? It was the first year we were here, at Elmondham Horse Show. Mr. Calderon’s horse won something, and

papa went up and congratulated him. Would you believe it, the ill-mannered creature just said, "Thank you," and turned his back. I don't call that gentlemanly; do you? . . . Perhaps that's what you'd call being "pleasant-spoken," Lottie?'

'He's a rare good landlord, Miss, and kind to the poor.'

'He may be all that, but he's not a gentleman. If he spoke to me I should turn my back. Papa is so silly, he might forgive him. He has no pride. But if ever I meet Mr. Calderon, I shall let him know that I have.'

Sidney said disinterestedly: 'I don't know him, and he's not the type of man I admire; but I must say he seems to be generally liked and respected. I have never heard an ill word of him.'

Enid shrugged: 'Oh, you needn't defend him! The man is hateful to me.'

'He will be in London, most likely, when you are. You may meet him,' Sidney pursued, with sly intent to exorcise a little imp of scarce personal jealousy which the vision of Hugh Calderon's manhood had begotten within him. She would see so many men more fit than a nervous poet to mate with her youth and vigour. He added, betraying his thought: 'You will forget me!'

'Oh, shall I?' cried Enid between archness and indignation. 'You seem to think me a kind of weathercock. And you talk as if I might get to like that Calderon person. How could I, after the way he treated my father! . . . How should I forget you?' Her eyes widened to frame her wonder at the mad idea. 'You are my own friend—the only friend I can call my very own. We're alike in so many ways. You don't worship money like papa and Ruth. And we've had such pleasant talks, it has made a little fairyland away from all the fuss and ceremony. You never find fault with me . . .'

'Who could?'

She laughed merrily at the interruption. 'You wouldn't say that if you could hear Mrs. Garland. I seem to do

nothing right. And Ruth is worse, for it's not her business. With you I get away from all that and fancy myself perfection for a little while. We must say good-bye now,' she concluded, extending her hand.

Boyne took it and gazed into her eyes.

'How I shall miss you!' he sighed. 'You don't know how dear you are to me!'

'Oh, you mustn't talk like that yet,' she rejoined, with the smile that knew not sentiment. 'There's still a fortnight before I go.'

But the shadow of the parting was already dark on Boyne. His nature enabled him to shut his eyes to dire possibilities, to mystify himself in a fool's paradise, but by no means guaranteed him against despair when, as now, his Elysium fell at length before the blast of reality. As he strayed alone through the darkening land towards where the western cloud dropped gold on far-off woods, he felt newly desolate.

CHAPTER III

THE HERMIT OF HEDGEHAM ST. MARY (*continued*)

ENID was gone. In vain did Boyne strive to conceive her present as he retraced the paths they had walked together. The old narcotic power of self-illusion, of evocation by day-dreams, escaped him now in his hour of need. There was no longer any hope of beholding her at a turn of the lane, at surmounting a stile. For two long months to come he was cut off from her as completely as if he or she had been dead. And who could swear that she would come back to him unchanged? His walks turned to black reverie. He knew the self-torment of the recluse, the anguish of introspection, gnawing heartwards, which punishes the extreme egoism.

Looking back, he cursed himself for a fool. What radiant opportunities he had allowed to slip by! Her remembered kindness seemed all of encouragement; he could not conceive how it had once daunted him. Now she was gone and he might never see her again.

Out of disgust of his own ineffectuality arose the resolve to strangle shyness, if only she were restored to his sight, to make hot love to her from the first meeting. His natural shrinking from bold courses frowned on the rash determination; but it grew, nevertheless, until it took the shape of a vow, a cry from his heart to God for one chance more. It would be hard to conquer his timorous nature; but that very hardship of the task gave it value as a votive penalty, and might tempt the powers above to impose it, just to try him.

On the strength of this sacrifice vowed to Providence, hope revived somewhat, or rather a feverish excitement in the room of hope.

He pondered the wildest expedients. It even occurred to him that he could apply to Sir Charles Vellum for an introduction to Enid's father and pay his addresses in due form. But only for a moment. Something warned him that his sole chance lay in preserving to their intercourse its glamour of secrecy, which invested him with the charm of an outlaw for romantic eighteen. It would be madness to court comparison with the men of her world, to be judged by their standard. By no means must he venture forth into the light. He would be bold, yes, truly, but within bounds.

By way of training for the manly part he had sworn to play, Boyne set himself little exercises in effrontery. He overcame his dislike to be stared at to the extent of going to church on Sunday mornings; and he bought his own tobacco in Elmondham, an errand formerly deputed to the village carrier. When he came across a labourer now in his walks, he would hazard some remark anent the weather or the hay.

To the same end he exhumed a pair of dumb-bells from among the lumber in an attic, and began to use them daily at regular hours. He tried the bracing effect of a cold bath every morning, and strove to limit the number of pipes to be smoked in a day. The self-discipline brightened his outlook. Killing time in a daily ritual for Enid's sake, it seemed to bring her nearer, to make things less impossible. And though with him even athletic practices took a colour of superstition, it certainly improved his health.

One Friday afternoon, the first in July, having walked into Elmondham after an early tea, he was standing in the dim, low-ceiled shop of the tobacconist with whom he always dealt when some one entered behind him. Sidney had been debating, in the interests of self-conquest, whether or no he could make one ounce of the dream-stuff suffice until the following Monday, when the loud ting of the opening door startled him, and he turned his head.

A man stepped in out of the shady High Street, where only the brow of the opposite house-ridge glowed warm in the sinking sun. With a thrill Boyne knew him, though out of livery, for the groom who had been wont to attend Enid and her sister on the morning ride. To prevent inquisitiveness on the part of Ruth, Enid had forbidden him to salute her when thus accompanied, herself riding by with no more than a roguish twinkle of the eyes. But the groom had more than once indulged in a respectful smile, and had latterly taken to touching his hat as he passed Boyne. Ever ready to leap at conclusions, the lover saw in him a well-wisher and possible ally.

‘Good evening to you,’ he said graciously.

Miles touched his hat very suddenly. ‘Good evenin,’ sir! You’ll pardon me not knowin’ you for the minute. It strikes dark in here after the street. Fine haymakin’ weather for the farmers, sir.’

He stood aside respectfully while Sidney completed his purchase.

As usual the impulse to be social discountenanced the recluse, overwhelming him like shame. Possessed with a strong desire to make friends with this man, who belonged to Enid, he dawdled in the shop while Miles was being served, but could think of nothing to say. To cloak hesitation, he made some show of arranging things in his pockets. Retiring at length discomfited, he had opened the ringing door when the groom, coming forth, relieved him of further embarrassment.

‘You’ll pardon the liberty, sir, but I’ve got the dog-cart round at the White Lion. I could save you the walk home, sir, if you care for a lift.’

‘Er—thank you—thank you very much indeed,’ said Sidney, for whom the narrow, irregular street, three-parts shadowed, underwent swift suffusion. ‘I accept your offer with pleasure.’

He donned a manly air, and strove to throw off abstraction as he traversed the town with this man, in a physical

sense his superior, who used him with such flattering deference. The last sunbeams, skimming the old roofs, stained them poppy-red here and there, and gilded gable-ends. Beneath, the narrow, tortuous street was a gorge full of shadow.

When, at a turn of the thoroughfare, the White Lion Inn faced them with upper windows aflame in the sunset, Sidney, with fluttering heart, dared propose that they should drink together before starting. At home he seldom drank anything stronger than tea. But the offer of a drink occurring to him as proper to that average manhood he had adopted as his standard for the time being, he uttered it, feeling adventurous; and his companion thanked him kindly.

In the private bar of the White Lion he ordered whisky and soda for two; and Miles, having sipped to his good health, told him the latest news of the Glover family. Miss Ruth had been presented at court by a countess, a friend of Mrs. Garland's, and, moreover, was engaged to be married to one Captain Stoke, a fine gentleman she had met in London.

'Any talk of Miss Enid following suit?' asked Boyne with vast carelessness, having first made sure that the barmaid was not listening.

Miles shook his head, with a smile as knowing as could consist with respect. He took time to answer, first emptying his tumbler and licking his lips reflectively.

'I've a notion that her taste ain't so much for the town, sir; she prefers the country,' he replied at length with a slight laugh, in which there lurked an innuendo that set Boyne tingling. And upon that he went off to harness the horse.

Warmed by the unaccustomed stimulant, and still more by the driver's friendly comprehension of his plight, Boyne's manner lost its reserve as he was borne homewards at the great, high-stepping trot of a fine animal. They seemed to devour each smoke-white stretch of road as it opened out before them, between hedges, beneath trees, amid a darkening, prostrate landscape, with the fading sunset

hung before them in the dimness like an altarpiece. The novel exhilaration he tasted in this brisk manner of going loosened Boyne's tongue. He no longer strove to veil his interest in the Glovers, and allowed his passion for the younger daughter of that family to transpire, without direct allusion, as a thing understood. The groom answered all his questions with respectful alacrity.

'Mr. Glover, sir? He ain't a bad sort of a gentleman. But you see, sir' (with deprecation), 'he's been in business. This is a new kind of life for him. And there's times when you can't help laughin'. He hardly knows one end of a hoss from t'other, and the keepers'll tell you he's mistook a thrush for a partridge before now. But there, you can't believe all they say! . . . They say Mrs. Garland gives him a dressin'-down now and again. My! she's the one to set any one to right. She's got a grand way with her, takes all the cheek out of you. She gives a look to the stables now and then, and it's my word! if there's anything wrong. She knows as much about hosses as the coachman hisself. I've heard her take him down finely once or twice. That must run in the family, sir, for her brother, Lord Elmsdale, sir, is the handiest man with a hoss I ever set eyes on, in service or out. . . . I'm havin' a pretty easy time of it just now, bein' left in charge of such o' the hosses as was not required up in town. There's a man and one or two females left in the house, not to speak of Mr. and Mrs. Anthony at the lodge, so you can't call it lonely. We has our little social evenin's, sir, among ourselves. . . . There's no one likes Miss Ruth much, except the old folks at the lodge which've known her from a babe, and Miss Enid's the favourite even with them. You see, sir, Miss Ruth has a very sharp temper, and she gives it us servants. Now Miss Enid's quite different to that, sir, though I don't say but what she has her temper too at times. She's a very spirited young lady, sir.'

The fires of sunset in the west had sunk to a faint glow, enhancing the dark outline of trees and scattered cottages in

that direction, when Miles pulled up at the gate from which a track led through two fields to Boyne's abode.

Sidney climbed down in silence, mustering his forces for a crowning piece of effrontery. Miles had already said 'Good-night, sir,' ere he blurted :

'Since your people are away and you're your own master, won't you stop to supper with me. It'll be served in a minute. And the horse can be taken out. I've got a stable.' He held the gate open enticingly. 'I shall be really pleased to have you. I'm quite alone here,' he added eagerly, seeing the groom seemed staggered by the proposal.

'No, no, sir. I can't presume that far,' said Miles, rubbing his head.

'Come on ! Do !' urged Sidney ; whereupon Miles turned his horse and drove in slowly at the gate.

'You're really too kind, sir.'

'Not a bit of it. I—I like to talk sometimes—about things.'

Arrived at the house, Boyne pointed out the stable to Miles and then rushed indoors to make preparations. It appalled him on entering the lamplit dining-room to behold a mutton-bone, which with bread, cheese, and condiments, was all that had been provided for his evening meal. The aspect of the supper-table was positively repulsive to him, now that he had a guest's appetite to consider, though alone he would have accepted it without comment. There must be better food in the house. Snatching up the dish on which the vile bone languished amid sprigs of parsley, he burst furiously into the kitchen, ordered the woman to produce something eatable, and sent the man flying half a mile to the village inn for a bottle of the finest whisky. The scared domestics murmured as they ran.

When Miles, after stabling his horse, came in with much wiping of boots and smoothing of hair, the table, crowded with scraps of food on plates of various sizes and patterns, wore a look of eccentric profusion.

‘I’m sure I’m very grateful to you, sir,’ said Miles as he took his seat. Sidney plied him earnestly with victuals, apologising for the lack of order, and was pleased to see him fall to with a relish. Anon the uncorking of the whisky diffused a subtle fragrance of conviviality.

Miles, never for a moment forgot himself. He was always the inferior, upon sufferance. But Sidney, under the unwonted influences of strong liquor and the company of a fellow creature, relaxed more and more, waxing friendly, even familiar. He avowed his love for Miss Enid, and the wild hope he cherished of winning her affections. His face looked fragile in its eagerness, a mere lamp of excitement.

‘Do you think I have the ghost of a chance?’ he asked pathetically, with flushed cheeks and glistening eyes. ‘Would you say she ever thinks of me?’

With a show of deliberation, Miles answered :

‘I should say, sir, you stand a better chance than almost any one—that is, from what I have observed, sir. One can’t help noticin’ a little thing now and then, and puttin’ two and two together; though I say nothing to nobody, for it ain’t my business to pass remarks.’

‘What have you noticed? What makes you conclude that she likes me?’ asked Sidney ravenously.

‘Well, sir’—Miles reflected. ‘Now you put it that way it’s hard to explain. She’s brightened up, sir, after she’s set eyes on you, and looked quite different for the rest of the ride. While on days when we haven’t passed you on the road, she’s seemed kind o’ downcast. I’ve noticed that, sir.’

‘Really? Do you truly mean it?’ Mad joy lit up Sidney’s face for a moment. ‘I have hoped that it might be so . . . But that maid she makes such a pet of, hates me. I’m sure she’d try and poison Miss Enid’s mind against me . . . And her people would never countenance my suit. They expect her to marry some one rich, and I’m not rich, you see; though I could afford to keep a wife comfortably in a modest way.’

‘Oh, I wouldn’t let that worry me, sir, if I was in your place. What you was sayin’ just now about your bein’ a relation of Sir Charles Vellum’d tell strong in your favour. My governor thinks a deal to Sir Charles, sir; they’re very thick together. Why, this gentleman Miss Ruth is a-goin’ to marry ain’t no richer than you, sir, judgin’ by what I hear. But he’s a gentleman born: that’s what takes the governor. And you bein’ the same, sir, and relations to Sir Charles into the bargain, I don’t see no cause for you to fret, sir . . . As for that Charlotte—the maid you was speakin’ of—I don’t think Miss Enid’d pay no regard to what she said. She’d let her speak her mind, maybe, bein’ a favourite, but she’d laugh and that’s all. It’s just a village-gal, sir, as our people took up out of charity. But Miss Enid have spoilt her to that extent, she gives herself the airs of a lady born. She’s pretty, face and figure, there’s no denyin’. But she won’t come to no good, sir, unless she change her ways. . . . But bless me, sir! ’tis ha’past nine already,’ he exclaimed suddenly, catching sight of the clock on the mantelpiece, and hastily comparing it with his watch, ‘I must be gettin’ on, sir. I’m sure I thank you, sir, for all your kindness. I wish you wanted a coachman, sir: I’d apply like a shot for the place. That’s my ideal of a job, sir, to work for a gentleman like you, as is affable and wouldn’t find fault so long as I did my duty.’

Sidney smiled inanely at the compliment. ‘Perhaps—who knows?—I may want a coachman some day,’ he said. ‘If ever the day comes, I shan’t forget you.’

‘Thank you kindly, sir. And if ever you need a friend, sir, in a humble way, sir . . .’ Something disproportionate in such heartfelt gratitude for small benefits affected Sidney as an appeal, and made him feel in his pockets. He found half-a-sovereign which he pressed into the groom’s hand, to even matters. . . . ‘Oh no, sir! I can’t, really! . . . Well, sir, all I can say is, you can always depend on me.’ Miles sank his voice a little. ‘I might manage to get a letter to the young lady, if you was ever wishin’ to write, sir.

There's one o' the housemaids'd see it reached her, and no one the wiser. If you was to address it under cover to me—Miles Bostock—at the Dragon, Ditchley, it'd be safe to get to her. I call in there most afternoons on my way to fetch the letters—and I'll be proud to be of use, sir.'

Sidney's exultation at having for once done the thing expected of him fell somewhat as the noise of wheels died away. He had walked as far as the high road to open gates for the passage of the dog-cart. A light breeze made night murmurous. Out of the earth-gloom, shapes of the scattered cottages rose black as ink upon an olive sky faintly throbbing with stars. A dog's bark on some farm out in the vague distance, where the Ditchley woods rimmed the horizon, wailed on the ear. A noise of wheels on far-off roads, incessant, yet drawing no nearer, raised a phantom to haunt the sense.

A slight uneasiness penetrated Boyne's intoxication. Had he not, perhaps, derogated in opening his heart to Miles? Was there not some treason to Enid in his wish to profit by the venality of a servant? Fuddled by five glasses of a drink to which he was not inured, he could not hear the inner voice distinctly. He was only aware of something at jar within him which disturbed serenity. He could hear nothing, see nothing, quite clearly. The faint rustle of the wind in the hedge, with other sounds of the night, seemed in no wise immediate; it might have belonged to the past or future. The roar of a train afar off, towards Elmondham, brought home to him this remoteness, this strange abstraction. Everything swam just beyond his grasp. It was no use trying to think in that fog; so he turned in, entertained with his own dexterity in steering a clear course through the gates, in locking the house door behind him, and lighting his bedroom candle. Once a-bed, he sank straightway on lethargy and presently fell into a heavy sleep.

But next morning the sun had not risen ere he was up and out, walking at a great pace in the blush of dawn. He

awoke in grey twilight to a new sinking, a strange remorse, which drove him forth into the pure, fresh morning to commune with himself.

What had he done? He had sullied the white wings of love. He had ceased to merit happiness. He had so far forgotten the dignity befitting Enid's lover as to corrupt one of her servants with a bribe. How that fee bespattered him!

In a brief five days she would be here again, to cheer his life as of yore. How would he dare to face her, knowing of what he had been guilty? How she would scorn him if she knew—she of the loyal eyes and level brows! It all came of indulgence in strong drink. An after-taste of the stuff recurring to nauseate him, he forswore whisky for evermore.

A thin veil of gossamer shimmered on the hedge. Cocks were crowing, hens beginning to cluck, in the farmyards he passed. Wood-pigeons cooed softly from the high trees. The air in his nostrils was cool and invigorating, virgin as yet, and clean of all taint of humanity. Out of the depths of despair and self-reproach he rose presently, by virtue of the fragrant morning, to heights of resolution. He vowed to amend. Never—he swore it by the morning light, by the dew, and by the lark's high song—never would he claim the service proffered by the scoundrel Miles.

Along the lanes labourers slouched to their work, with faces lit by the sunbeams, and limbs in the shadow of the hedge. They threw him a gruff 'good day' with a wag of the head in passing. Instinctively he walked towards Ditchley. He traversed Hedgeham All Saints, where cottage-doors were opening, and crossed a white-railed bridge beneath purling poplars. The marshes opened out on either hand, a-bask and steaming in the young sunshine. On the opposite rise the white sails of Ditchley mill were turning already, and a little smoke rose out of the hollow to the left where lay the village. The rustic world was astir, ridding Boyne of that scathing sense of isolation which

had embittered his setting-out. He felt almost cheerful, as he entered the shade of hedgerow elms on the Ditchley side.

Past the windmill, he sat on a stile for a few minutes, looking up at a sky of forget-me-not blue, on which a fair white cloud sailed like a stately merchantman. Only a few more days—a week at most—and Enid would return. All that Miles had said concerning his chances recurred now to inspirit him. The skylark's song fell drop on drop out of the clear ether, a distilled rapture. His walk, begun in anguish, assumed the character of a lover's pilgrimage. Light of heart, light of foot, he walked on towards the Abbey.

The road, skirting the park fence, ran hooded in the foliage of great trees. Here the ground he trod quivered like a snake's skin with a delicate pattern of alternate light and shade, the effect of the sunbeams through the mazy leaves. Presently he emerged into strong sunlight near the park gates, where, for a space, the trees receded, forming a kind of clearing. In the garden belonging to the tiny lodge, almost extinguished by an enormous roof of thatch, he espied a little old man in shirt-sleeves, hard at work.

It must be he of whom Miles had spoken, he who had known and loved Enid from her babyhood. Boyne stood by the hedge, admiring the garden, bright with summer flowers till the old man noticed him and said:

'Good mornin'!'

'How beautifully you keep your garden!' stammered Boyne. Whereupon the old fellow smiled amicably, and, dropping his hoe, drew near to the hedge on his side.

'Think so?' he chuckled. 'Most people seems to notice it, what go by. I won't deny but what I take some pains. Ye see, I look at it this way: This 'ere lodge is like the doorstep o' the Abbey. Now if I see a dirty doorstep, I says to myself: "Lor, what pore miserable creetur lives there!" And it's the same with folks which go by 'ere; was they to see my garden all weedy and uncared-for-lookin', they'd say, "Lor, what a sloven kind of a gentleman

that Mr. Glover must be! Look at the way that lodge is let down." Oh, there's more'n you'd think lies in appearances, young gentleman. Now in business we always looks first to the winder. Keep your winder smart, and you get a good name. I learnt that with the governor. . . . Ah! they don't want me and my old woman no longer up at the 'ouse. We're pensioned off, ye see, arter forty years—that's 'ow long I've been with 'em. But I ain't done workin' for 'em yet, you may see for yerself. Ah, I like a bit o' garden! The young ladies fancy a posy out o' my garden more'n what the gardeners cut for 'em up at the 'ouse. I let 'em pick for 'emselves, pretty dears! Why, I can mind Miss Ruth bein' born like yesterday, and here she's a-goin' to be married! How times flit, to be sure!

'And the other young lady—Miss Enid—she'll soon be getting married, I suppose?' said Boyne, craving sweet assurance.

The old man squared his shoulders, looking almost fierce for a moment. 'I tell you what, young sir: there ain't a man 'alf good enough for our Miss Eny—not on this side o' Novy Scoty, which is nowhere. But I suppose she'll go like the rest of 'em. And if you ask me, 'tis my belief as she'll marry young Mr. Land, the son o' Mr. Stephen Land, as is 'er father's partner. You may've 'eard talk o' Glover and Land. It's a great firm in the Midlands, I can tell yer! Ask a man in Walsall, or Birmingham, whether he's heard o' Glover and Land and he'll laugh at yer for puttin' ridicker-lus questions. Mr. Stephen 'ave only this one son, Master Freddy as we used to call him, and he's as rich as Mr. Glover is, just the same. I know the governor counts on Miss Eny marryin' Master Freddy. Ye see, Mr. Land and 'im 've been partners years and years and 'e'd like to keep Miss Eny in the firm as is only nat'ral. But, as I was sayin' . . .'

'I must really be going now,' Sidney here interrupted. 'Good-day to you.' And he strode on, leaving the talkative lodge-keeper dismayed at his abrupt defection.

He had a rival, a rival more formidable even than Hugh Calderon, whose image had sometimes occurred to him as that of the type of man most to be feared. This rival held her already by her childhood—a sacred bond he supposed. Perhaps she had already plighted her troth to this Land! Perhaps he had been her companion all this while in London! The bare conjecture gave Boyne poison. He recalled her face as he had last seen it, the kind smile on her lips, the good faith in her eyes, as she promised not to forget him. It drove him mad only to conceive of another man possessing her. At all costs he must write to her, speak with her, hear the judgment from her own lips. Miles, the late abhorred, shone now as a providential agent.

Boyne strode home in a fever. The brightness of the day was turned a mockery, the hum of insects and twitter of birds irritated him. After a mere pretence at breakfast, he sought his private room, and there remained for hours at his desk, inditing note after note, and tearing up each as soon as written. The sunshine through the window had the glitter of something venomous to his distempered gaze. He feared to say too much lest she should take fright and avoid him, but it seemed impossible to condense his passionate longing into a few calm words. At length he evolved the following which seemed good to him upon perusal:

‘DEAR MISS ENID,—I have something most important to say to you. Would you mind meeting me at the old stile behind Ditchley Mill one afternoon as soon as possible after your arrival. I hope you will not think me rude to address you in this surreptitious manner. You will hold me excused when you hear what I have to communicate.

‘You can’t think how I have missed you!

‘Believe me, dear Miss Enid, ever most faithfully yours,

‘SIDNEY BOYNE.’

This, enveloped and directed, was thrust into a large envelope which he addressed as Miles had instructed him, and himself handed that same afternoon to the landlord of the Dragon at Ditchley.

CHAPTER IV

MISTRESS AND MAID

WHEN Enid returned to Ditchley the familiarity of her eyes with the place exceeded that of her heart, so much seemed to have happened since last it beat there. In two months she had developed from a self-willed, spoilt child into a conscious maiden, awake to an interest in life beyond the whim of the moment. If she still revolted from discipline, it was no longer of mere froward impulse, but a more or less deliberate struggle for independence.

Ruth, her elder sister, showed an appetite for novels of the type called 'up-to-date'—a phrase often on her lips—and Enid had taken up and devoured some of the books she left about, works Mrs. Garland would not have countenanced her reading. They told of girls breaking the prison of a luxurious, idle existence and going down alone into the battle. How the warrior in Enid acclaimed and envied those girls! The theme of the stories aroused wonder, made her curious concerning herself and her destiny, but scarcely enlightened her. When she discussed them afterwards with her chosen confidante, Lottie, whose cottage upbringing had spared but few illusions, stood amazed before the depth of innocence revealed in her naïve comments. But the knowledge that some women despised the ease-laden, empty life of the rich sufficed to make her restless.

She was not happy at home. No one understood her. Everybody found something to chide in her behaviour. It seemed she could do nothing right. The perpetual fault-finding kept her pride always aflame.

Once, when she fired under a reproof, Mrs. Garland had said to her :

‘You mustn’t be angry, love. I try to improve you for your own sake, not to please myself. I am very fond of you, Enid, and I should like you to be perfection. You wouldn’t wish people hereafter to call you ill-mannered and wonder wherever you were brought up.’

‘You never find fault with Ruth like that !’ Enid retorted bitterly. ‘I feel an Ishmaelite in this house.’

‘Ruth is quite different,’ Mrs. Garland sighed. ‘I have not the same hopes of Ruth. As for your feeling an Ishmaelite, my dear child, it is quite ridiculous ! Whose hand is against you ? You’re a favourite with every one. If only you would be a little more docile, think a little less of yourself and your own dignity and more of other people, I should have no fault to find with you.’

The slight social veneer glozing all Mrs. Garland’s advances towards a better understanding, gave them the taste of artifice for a maiden swayed by nude impulse, and, blinding Enid to her almost motherly kindness, robbed them of their due effect. When, after the above conversation, Mrs. Garland playfully named her the Ishmaelite, she flushed as at a fresh aggravation.

Ruth’s engagement had shed some glamour of excitement over the last three weeks in London. But Enid, though rejoicing with her sister, could not help marvelling somewhat at Ruth’s exultation. Kenneth Stoke was undeniably a gentleman, she herself rather liked him than otherwise, but she could see no point in him to arrest a girl’s fancy. She was odd, she supposed. Ruth was more like other people, and Ruth was her opposite in most respects.

The elder Miss Glover had always been entirely pleased with the life mapped out for her as daughter of a very rich man. In her estimation poor people could not be said to live at all, life being a round of amusements within reach only of the wealthy. Marriag was almost the only event to which she looked forward in common with humbler girls ; and that

meant, for her, freedom from certain restrictions custom lays upon the maiden. It would be a thrilling experience, gate, so she read, to a field of new and agreeable sensations. This being so, the person of the man was of small account, provided he were rich or a gentleman. She had expounded this view to Enid, when the latter inquired of her feelings under betrothal; and when her junior presumed to question its justice she had turned snappish, threatening a quarrel.

Enid herself would not have chosen to wed with any one of the men who frequented their house in town. Kenneth was the best of them; but about him, as about the rest, there was something stereotyped, unreal, conventional. Weary of their uniformity, her thoughts had often turned with relief to the remembered figure of Sidney Boyne. He at least was individual and stood aloof from the frock-coated, drawling herd. Their secret meetings, which at the time she had enjoyed as a game, appeared now to her awakened sense romantic. She remembered how nice he had always been and, revising her memories of him, half suspected that he loved her.

A man who gave himself up to lonely thought and study, scorning the crowd, might be worthy of love, she considered. The lone form had a certain grandeur which appealed to her imagination. She wondered how she would feel at meeting him once again. Though alive now to its impropriety, she fully intended to resume their traffic, from a curiosity touching herself rather than Sidney, a craving for emotional experience. Yet when, chancing to displace the pincushion on her dressing-table, she found his note, she became all anger for the moment. She rang up Lottie and asked:

‘How did this get here?’

The maid’s innocence was transparent. She knew nothing of the letter. She offered, however, to make inquiries. But Enid, upon a little reflection, forbade her. Any fuss would involve disclosure of her secret acquaint-

ance with Boyne, to her everlasting disgrace. Besides the incident, upon cooler consideration, was not without romantic interest.

‘What can he have to say to me?—so important!’ she wondered.

‘Why, Miss, what else than that he loves you? I’ve seen it in his face many’s the time. Unless you’re willing to hear that, I advise you not to go.’

‘Nonsense, Lottie! He hasn’t seen me for two whole months!’

‘Time to know his own mind!’ retorted Lottie, whose wits had the property to run on love-making. It relieved her that Mr. Boyne should at last declare himself. She had found something sinister in his former hesitation. Once sure of his honourable intentions—they could hardly be other than honourable towards such a lady—she would be able to sympathise with proceedings which before she had reluctantly condoned. Love with marriage in perspective licensed a little deception of parents and guardians. A strong, if silent, partisan of her mistress, she saw Enid as one oppressed and persecuted, and did not wonder at her rebellious thirst for adventure. Besides, the idea of Enid, her heroine of romance, to be complete, required adoring gentlemen. Mr. Boyne might serve for a commencement. He offered an example from which Miss Enid could learn somewhat of the ways of men, while testing her own powers of attraction. If he proved but sufficiently in earnest to be tame and safe to play with, she would say nothing to dissuade her queen and comrade from meeting him.

Such was the morality evolved by Lottie Heaviland from her own experiences, first at the village school, then at home, and latterly in the housekeeper’s room. In the spirit of this morality she approached the rendezvous, rather encouraging than seeking to deter her mistress.

On a path which skirted a field of ripening wheat they beheld Mr. Boyne a-prowl in the shade of the hedge, swinging his stick as of yore. Consciousness that she had been

careless in climbing over the last stile, when he might have seen her, gave Lottie a blush as well as Enid.

Woolly clouds, white, and soft, and lazy, floated at rest on the blue. The sun appeared the central point of a wide-spread influence rather than a contained luminary. Afar, across the hedgerows, the sails of Ditchley mill revolved like the play of Indian clubs by a manikin. A breeze skimmed the face of the land, while the sky hung breathless, an arrested pageant. The rustled corn-spears sang together like reeds. Every detail of the scene thrust itself with singular insistence upon Enid's notice in the awkward pause before Sidney Boyne spoke.

He was greatly agitated, she could see. His face looked lean with excitement. On his craving leave to speak with her apart, she walked on with him in silence, motioning Lottie to await her there.

After a pause fraught with embarrassment for both of them, he said: 'So you got my note?'

She replied: 'I was surprised, and a little angry, at finding it.'

'Can't you guess what it is that I have to tell you?'

'No, I've been wondering.'

'How could you wonder! How could you doubt for a minute!—It is that I love you, Enid. All through your long absence I have been in torment, nerving myself for this, yet hardly daring, I so feared your anger. Enid!—Don't shrink from me like that! It hurts! I feel unworthy to lift eyes to you—a very worm at your feet. Yet once, before I met you—it seems ages ago—I was happy in myself, proud of my talent. But now my peace is gone. My soul has passed to you. I am nothing, less than nothing without you. O Enid, my health, my strength, my religion—my all on earth—have pity! See how I suffer!'

His agitation was contagious. Enid, retreating from his vehemence, found the sky, the white clouds, the hedgerows dim and unsteady to her gaze. Scared, swept off her feet, confused by the wave of his frenzied eloquence, and aware

of something new, unlooked-for, a-throb within her, the struggle for self-mastery, for mere facial control, chilled her reply :

‘I can’t let you speak to me like this. It’s madness. I’m ashamed of you, Sidney!’

‘Then it’s true!—There is some one else. O Enid, you are killing me! Don’t say it’s hopeless! Let me hope, only let me hope! I ask nothing of you, nothing but that.’

For a moment it seemed as though he were going to sprawl on the ground at her feet. In haste to prevent so abject an exhibition, she smiled on him, saying ‘Come, Sidney, don’t be ridiculous! I like you so much better as a man than as a worm. Besides, I don’t know what you’re talking about. “Some one else”! I know no one else.’

‘Then I may hope! You do love me then a little?’ The madness of his eyes distressed her.

‘I can’t answer you, Sidney. I don’t know what to say or think. If it’s any comfort to you to know that I like you better than any man, except my father, I can assure you of that. I can’t stop your hoping, if you wish to hope. But I must beg you never to speak to me again in this way, or I shall have to give up meeting you. . . . Now tell me, what made you think there was some one else?’

‘That old servant of yours, who lives at the thatched lodge. He said your father meant you to marry the son of his partner—a man named Land.’

‘Freddy!—Never!’ exclaimed Enid with a proud shiver, for which Boyne could have kissed her feet. The allusion to his dealings with old Anthony seemed to throw reassuring light on the channel by which that note had reached her. She was glad to believe it had passed through such trustworthy hands.

‘Now promise never to talk like that again,’ she said coaxingly.

But Boyne cried out: ‘I can’t—I can’t promise. I’ll try to obey you—I swear I will try—but I can’t promise.’

At that she hardened her face, saying: 'You shall not see me again unless you promise.'

'Oh, I promise then! I promise anything! But—O God!—if I break my promise! I will try—I will school myself. You must bear with me. You had told me you were not happy at home, how you hated the cult of money and longed sometimes to fly from it. And I hoped you might come to me, away from the worry and the fault-finding. I should never find fault—how could I?—for I see none in you. I had hoped you would one day turn to me, saying: "I love you, Sidney. Take me away with you, right away from this hateful Ditchley." And then we should have flown together, like two swallows, away to sunnier lands, to forget all that was past, all save our love. That was my wild hope, Enid.'

His tone grew more sensible, she thought; he was talking prettily now; so to reward his better behaviour she opened her mind to him, reading in it aloud thoughtfully as one reads from a book.

'I am often unhappy: that is quite true. And I do long, often and often, to leave home and be natural. I know you would never find fault with me, you're as blind as a bat! And I like you better than any one else I know. . . . I can't tell what may happen. Perhaps, some day, I shall like you very much indeed, enough to say "I love you," and leave all for you. But at present I don't feel a bit like that; you are just my private friend. Now let's go back to Lottie.'

Emboldened by her gracious manner, Boyne essayed to take her hand, but she snatched it away, with a sudden fierce glance into his eyes which paralysed him:

'No; no nonsense, Sidney!—or I say good-bye for good!'

They walked back in silence to where Lottie stood awaiting them on tenterhooks of inquisitiveness. Boyne shortly took his leave.

'Well, was I right, Miss?' said Lottie, as they returned towards the bank of sloc-coloured woods which had never been absent from their horizon.

‘Yes ; but don’t talk to me, Lottie.’

Enid was still shaking from the interview. Her symptoms of distress perplexed Lottie, who had herself repeatedly experienced the predicament and could have slipped out of it as smoothly and unconcernedly as a little eel. To wean her sovereign’s mind from brooding too long on the incident, she proposed tea with Mrs. Anthony, and Enid welcomed the suggestion.

By the time they neared the lodge, the heat of the day was spent, and the evening concert of birds had begun in the great trees of the park. Old Thomas came trotting to the gate to meet them, loquacious as usual, beginning to speak from afar.

‘Mr. Land’s come—your Uncle Steve, as you call him. It does me good to see ’im ’earty. And Master Freddy which is growed a hordinary young gent. Come down a train afore they was expected, Miss, and drove through these ’ere gates in a ’ired fly about a hour ago. . . . Tea? Bless yer, she’s got it on the table, and if she ’adn’t she could get it for yer in two minutes. Go in, my dears, you’re quite at home!’

Long after Martha had removed the tea-things the two girls sat on in the trim little parlour, hearing their hostess bemoan the changes up at the house in wailing accompaniment to her husband’s optimistic chirp. Enid was slow to move. In her excitement over meeting Sidney once more she had forgotten that visitors were expected, and the information that Freddy Land awaited her at the Abbey had the shock of bad news. With reluctance she rose at length, when sunset threw the pattern of the diamond panes in vermillion upon the flowered wall-paper. Old Thomas escorted her to the gate, prolonging adieux.

The desire of quiet possessed her, and here she was doomed to make diversion for Freddy Land, a youth she abominated on account of the old talk of marriage with him. To secure a respite, she attached herself that evening to the father, for whom she had a real affection, ignoring the son’s

fatuous grin which pursued her everywhere with invitation. On the plea of great fatigue she went early to bed.

She needed space for reflection. At Sidney's passionate appeal some new, disturbing chord had vibrated within her. She wanted time to decide whether its tones were harsh or sweet.

While these guests stayed at the Abbey, it would be impossible to meet Sidney. And if she failed to appear he would fret and pine, imagining she scorned him, when all the while she was detained against her will. Her abhorrence of Freddy Land and his grinning claim set a halo round Sidney. To spare him the pangs of a misunderstanding, on the following afternoon she despatched Lottie to the tryst with a message explaining her dilemma.

The maid sped fleet-foot on her errand, enjoying its flavour of adventure and her walk through blowing corn-fields where great poppies burned amid the mist of stems like lamps in the night. From afar off she descried Mr. Boyne, set in meditation on a stile which broke the outline of a high, thick hedge. There he was, waiting and watching patiently! The something doglike in his blind dependence on his mistress roused Lottie's compassion together with no small contempt. She herself liked impudence in a lover.

At seeing her come alone, Boyne's face grew wan with anxiety.

'What has happened?' he asked at once.

'Miss Enid sent me, sir, to say she's so sorry, but she's afraid she won't be able to meet you for a fortnight, seeing as there's company at the Abbey.'

Lottie stood before him demurely, with hands folded, while she repeated the message. Boyne's woebegone face at the tidings inwardly amused her.

'A fortnight!' he groaned. 'Oh, it's too much! Just when she's come back to me! Couldn't she manage to slip out once—only once, to reassure me?'

In the earnestness of his vicarious pleading, he drew near

to Lottie, and she wondered if he was going at last to take a little notice of her. His previous apathy to a presence usually reckoned by men attractive was in part responsible for the slight grudge she bore him. He was not ugly at close quarters, only a little too lean and wild-looking.

‘She can’t get out anyhow, sir; it’s quite impossible,’ she declared, observing him the while with eyes apparently downcast. ‘The two Mr. Lands are at the Abbey now and her pa would notice if she slipped away.’

‘Land! . . .’ Sidney gripped her arm, and she kept very still pending further provocation. He would try to kiss her next, she supposed, and she, having boxed his ears, would go away laughing with a better opinion of him.

As one in some dire extremity, he gasped and mouthed ere he could enunciate:

‘Lottie!’

‘Yes, sir, I’m listening.’ She made a gentle, unsuccessful attempt to release her arm. His grasp only tightened.

‘I want you to tell me, honestly, truthfully: Is Miss Enid engaged to that young Land? Is there anything between them?’

Lottie replied with indignation, not all for Enid:

‘No, sir. Of course there’s not. Miss Enid’s open as the day. She’d never think o’ carrying on with him and you together. It shames you to think it of her, sir.’

All at once she tore her arm from his clutch and, red as a poppy, turned her back on him. A rough, sunburnt face was scowling at them over the stile, its owner standing stock-still in the lane beyond, as one petrified. With dismay Lottie recognised her brother. With a last threatening look he was moving on, when Lottie, leaving Mr. Boyne to bewilderment, flew to overtake him. In a trice, regardless of skirts, she had vaulted the stile and was running after him down the grassy drift.

‘Chris! Chris!’ she panted, coming up with him.

Christmas abated nothing of his rolling stride, nor even looked at her, to growl:

‘I wonder yow have the face to speak to me arter what I just seen wi’ my own eyes, ye flarty, light-conducted mawther! Yer character fare about as clean as my high-lows. Father’ll be main glad to hear o’ the way yow be improvin’ yerself among the gentry!’

‘O Chris, you’re mistaken. It wasn’t what you thought, really! The gentleman’s nought to me, no more than that old stump yonder. I brought a message to him from the Abbey.’

‘The hedge-side fare a nice place to gie a message in; that that most sartenly dew,’ said Chris with sarcasm.

‘I happened to meet him, that was all. He’s no friend o’ mine—I can’t abide the man. Only I had to give the message——’

‘Wherefore’—broke in Chris judiciously, still without deigning to glance at her eager face—‘Wherefore did he cotch tight hold on ye then? Answer me that!’

‘He’s a rather peculiar gentleman.’

‘Ha, ha! That’s a good un, that is. Pecooliar—I like that. Strikes me there’s a many pecooliar that way. Ah, father and mother’ll fare right pleased to hear how yow be a-dewin’ ’long o’ the gentry!’

Lottie’s patience gave way before such crass stupidity. She tired too of the run to keep up with him. At last she fell back with:

‘You can say what you like, Chris. You can tell father all your black thoughts about me. But all you tell him’ll be lies—dirty lies!’

For answer, he flung after her:

‘Prate away, my mawther. But if ever so be as I cotch yow at that gaune again, dew yow look out for yerself, that’s all!’

Blind with grief and indignation, flushed and murmuring to herself, Lottie fled back to the Abbey, seeing nothing by the way. When Enid, all expectant, asked: ‘What did he say? How did he look when you told him?’ she had no recollection of Mr. Boyne, but gasped: ‘Oh, I’m so vexed,

Miss. My brother Chris came on us in his way home from work, and scowled fit to kill any one. I could see he thought harm of us standin' there together. When I ran after him to explain, he said the eruellest things—things to shame any girl.'

'How intensely silly of him !' said Enid lightly.

But to Lottie it seemed a grave misadventure.

CHAPTER V

THROUGH ENID'S EYES

ON Sunday morning, there being no conventicle within walking distance, Stephen Land, though a strict Presbyterian, went to Ditchley church with Mrs. Garland and the girls ; and on his return had stern eyes for his son, emerging from the smoking-room with a yellow-backed volume in one hand while the other screened a yawn.

‘Well, how did you like it?’ inquired his host, just home from another church he preferred to Ditchley, for the greater dignity of his pew there.

‘Fine,’ was the answer. ‘At first going in I was concerned to see a green cloth on the table, and a popish cross and candles. And I never like your set prayers, specially when they give ’em singsong. But the sermon was truly edifying. Your minister has a great gift. If Fred had been there instead of profaning the Sabbath, he might have learnt where such paths lead to. But I think there’s nothing’ll set him right, unless he has the luck to get a godly wife.’ He looked very kindly at Enid. ‘There’s something pleases me about kneeling on your knees. There’s no denying it looks better than just ducking heads as we do, when we don’t stand. I like to see people do it, especially lassies. You made a pretty picture during the prayers, Miss Enid, though I ought not to tell you so.’

Enid’s withdrawal at this juncture was more flight than retreat, though her dignity made it seem the latter. Freddy seconded his father’s wishes. She had read covetous approval in his gaze at her. But she could not endure his

presence. He was foppish, vain, silly, dissipated, and with a boy's indiscreetness inclined to brag of his dissipations.

The morning had been showery, but towards evening the sky cleared. Between tea and dinner the whole company strolled in the pleasance beside the house, keeping in the glow of the sun, which sank yellowing upon the wall of woodland.

Freddy Land annexed Enid, trying to lure her apart. But whenever she perceived they were drifting away from the rest of the party, she drew back again, though he failed not to complain of her roughness on a fellow. His fatuity was proof against the snubs she took pains to administer. At last she changed her tactics, hoping to swamp him with a flood of talk on lofty problems he had never dreamt of facing. She did not count her words, rather wishing her gadfly adorer to think her mad.

Freddy was fairly cowed for a space. But presently, the first shock past, he decided she was joking and ejaculated, 'Oh, ah!' and 'What bally rot!' with winks and knowing wags of the head. Even supposing her earnest, he did not much mind, being of an age which demands only bodily perfections of womankind. He was ready to swallow any amount of cleverness and nonsense along with such a clinking girl. So he stuck to her like a limpet until the roar of a gong called every one indoors to dress for dinner.

She did, however, manage to stave off for that day the proposal with which he was obviously bursting; and on the morrow she sedulously avoided him, going even so far as to invent a headache. It was but postponement. One morning he caught her in a passage when she had flown upstairs in her riding-habit, intent only on finding Lottie. She had just received a severe scolding from Mrs. Garland, and her blood was up.

Freddy barred the way jocosely, stretching out a hand to either wall.

'Stop!' he commanded, all a-grin with self-complacency; and she stopped agast.

‘I’ve got something to ask you.’

‘Make haste then!’ she retorted, beginning to beat with her foot on the carpet.

‘I say, we’re going to be married, aren’t we? Do say yes!’

‘No; once for all and a thousand times, no! Let me pass, sir! You are hateful!’

She swept by him in majesty. Dumbfounded, he watched her swift glide down the corridor to a chamber where Lottie sat sewing.

Enid burst in on her, and, sinking into a chair, exclaimed: ‘I’ve had such a time of it with Mrs. G.’

Lottie laid aside her work and sat expectant. After a pause to recover breath, Enid began:

‘First of all, I must tell you I’ve found out who got that note into the house. It’s Miles. He gave me another to-day with a horrid knowing look that sickened me. It was as we were coming through the park, quite near home.

‘I questioned him pretty sharply as to how he came by it, who it was from, and so forth. You see, I wanted to find out how much he really knew. He pretended he knew nothing at all, except that it had been given him by a gentleman with instructions to give it me privately when I was alone. He said: “I thought it might be important, Miss”—can’t you hear him?—and looked too, too innocent.

‘Well, of course, while I talked to him, our horses were neck and neck; and it seems Mrs. G. must have been spying out of one of the windows, for the minute I came in she pounced on me, took me into her sitting-room and gave me such a wiggling! She couldn’t have pitched into me more if I had been letting that vile man make love to me. She lashed me up into a royal rage, and the worst of it was I had to keep silent. I couldn’t tell her the truth without letting out about Sidney. So I had to stand there without a word, just as if I’d been guilty of all she hinted. She must have the horriest mind! . . .

‘Then, when I flew upstairs to tell you, that donkey, Fred,

must stop me in the passage and propose to me. I nearly slapped his face. Isn't it disgusting?'

'What did Mr. Boyne say in his letter, Miss?'

 asked Lottie for sole comment.

'Oh; nothing much. He only wants us to meet him on St. Mary's Green next time. It's rather a long way off; but he declares that the old place is no longer safe. He seems to have misunderstood that meeting with your brother. He saw you look scared and go running after the man, and he took it into his head that it was some kind of a spy. He's been there since, he says, and has seen the same man hanging about. It's too silly; but you can read for yourself!'

Lottie sighed over the letter. 'Oh, I knew some harm would come of Chris finding me like that!'

'Nonsense!' said Enid loftily. 'There's no harm, only a misunderstanding.'

Lottie remained silent for some time. At length she faltered:

'I do wish Mr. Boyne'd get to know your father, Miss, and call at the house, and have it all respectable. He could contrive it quite easily, as Sir Charles is his relation.'

'Respectable!' Enid culled the obnoxious word and held it up to wonder. 'What are you thinking of, Lottie? He's not at all rich, and naturally doesn't care to visit at a house where money is the only consideration. He'd stand no chance with papa, so he comes straight to me. I call that rather sensible.'

On the morrow Stephen Land departed, somewhat precipitately, with his graceless son. He kissed Enid sadly at parting, with the words: 'I don't blame you, my pet. You are perfectly right. He's unworthy of you. I had my hopes, and they're dashed, but that's neither here nor there.'

She was sorry to be the means of his disappointment. There was something shaggy and honest about Uncle Steve which secured him from the contempt she flung broadcast on the herd of money-grubbers. The Circean cup of wealth

had not turned him, as it did so many, into a rooting hog with a gold ring in his snout. Had some other man, any other man, Sidney Boyne even, been his son, she thought she might have schooled herself to contemplate the alliance, simply to please him.

From her father's manner of caressing her she gathered that he too was disappointed. Freddy would be very rich! The flash of her scorn at his one idea blinded to all else, and she was not sorry for him.

Ruth's wedding was not to take place until the following January; but Kenneth was under a promise to come to Ditchley in September, when the tradesman-squire proposed to entertain him with sport and revels on a lordly scale. Mrs. Garland peered down a vista of cares. Already preparations were on foot for the festivities in connection with Captain Stoke's visit, though it wanted a full month of the time appointed. Talk at meal-times was of nothing else. All the flutter and discussion, concerning her not in the least, irritated Enid. Such excitement, beseeeming the arrival of some crowned head or mighty conqueror, struck her as out of all proportion to the merits of Kenneth, a worthy but commonplace individual. Her father talked of convoking all the countryside in his honour, of organising an enthusiastic welcome by villagers at the railway station. But what disgusted her most was to hear that Sir Charles Vellum had promised to bring Mr. Calderon of Hamford to the garden-party and dance with which the revels were to open. When her father announced this one morning as they sat at breakfast, with rubbing of hands and every appearance of the highest satisfaction, she gasped:

'Papa! . . . After the way he behaved to you at that horse-show you'll never, surely, receive him in this house!'

She blushed as all eyes turned on her. Mrs. Garland was smiling, approvingly, as it seemed to her confusion.

'If papa is willing to overlook his rudeness, I can't see how it concerns you,' snapped Ruth.

Old Simon, pleased with his daughter's championship as

a proof of affection, only reddened a little as he replied cheerily :

‘Yes, why not? Don’t look so horrified, pet! We must let bygones be bygones. I’ve learnt since—er—that I was in the wrong on that occasion. It is not etiquette for a newcomer to accost a gentleman in his position. I see that quite clearly now. And so I asked Sir Charles to convey my apologies to Mr. Calderon, and he—ha, ha!—now takes all the blame to himself, and begs my pardon through Sir Charles. So all that’s done with, and he’s coming here on September the fifth with the Vellums.’ He added slyly: ‘Who knows, but he may take a fancy to some one here. I have still a girl to give away. And he’s an eligible—eh, madame?’

‘So I hear,’ said Mrs. Garland suavely. ‘It is long years since last I met him. He was then a schoolboy.’

‘You know him then? I wonder he has never called here to see you!’

‘He is a friend of my brother’s. But the last time he saw me was on a very sad occasion, of which he knows I should not wish to be reminded.’

‘Oh—er—um,’ murmured Simon Glover sympathetically, scenting an allusion to the late Mr. Garland. The whole conversation had been bitter as gall for Enid, who felt sure that the servants must be laughing in their sleeves.

Now that she was once more free to pursue the study of lovesickness offered to her in the case and person of poor Sidney, Enid shrank from it unaccountably. In the first flush of novelty, it had tempted her. But enforced delay, giving time for reflection, bred misgivings. Sidney was no longer the tame companion of last winter. She feared the madness once seen in his gaze. She feared, and yet felt drawn, like a bird under fascination of some awful eye.

Would he keep his word and really strive never more to offend her with ravings? She doubted his power to control the fiend within him. A demon possessing her private friend, making him dangerous: that was now her conceit

of love. For more than a week she postponed meeting him from day to day, though Lottie laughed at her reluctance.

At length, as she hesitated, notes began to arrive from him, humble cries for mercy, entreating her to say in what he had offended. She found one on her toilet-table, another between the pages of a book she was reading. The need to put a stop to these secret letters, which shamed her, impelled her at last to the rendezvous.

They met on an upland stretch of heath, two miles from any village. The highway ran white across it, sinuous with the undulations of the land, its telegraph-posts standing up in places so clear against the sky that the wires joining them were separately visible. A cottage and some woods crouched dark on the horizon.

Enid, of forethought, kept Lottie at her side. But Boyne appeared not only tame but shy, in striking contrast to his behaviour at their last meeting. After threading a path through gorse and bracken, they scrambled down a briery slope into a lane skirting marshes, the invariable occupants of a dale in that country. A stile inviting, they crossed it and entered on a path that skimmed the smooth fen to the brink of the same sluggish river which flowed by Ditchley, here shaded with queenly poplars.

It was an afternoon of vague significance. The lush green meads were a mist, the yellowish sky a mist. The beams of a sun scarce seen, filtering through the high foliage, dappled the olive surface of the stream with shapely, warm patches like autumn leaves afloat.

Sidney's demeanour breathed a chivalrous desire to atone, very soothing to Enid's majesty. She granted him her hand at the stile, and on the planks they had to cross over ditches choked with reeds and cresses, willow-herb and myosotis. It was charming to feel so small a concession taken as something ineffable.

The air was dense and very still. The splash of a frog dwelt on the ear; and the church clock at Elmondham,

striking four, was heard as an echo floating up the valley, that filled the haze with faint booming as of a swarm of bees. It was but mid-August, yet the taste of autumn was in every breath.

They saw a house in the style of a fair-sized parsonage, white and bosomed in shadowy trees. Enid, for something to say, admired its position, when Boyne replied :

‘A house I often covet. With one I loved, it would make an ideal home.’

She flashed a glance at him, prepared to fulgurate, but his clean-shaven, dreamy face wore an expression of mere weariness with which she could not quarrel. And it was his only approach to offending her on that day.

She told him of Kenneth's visit and the approaching festivities, mentioning her disgust at her father's prostration before that Mr. Calderon.

‘I do so wish you were going to be there!’ she sighed. ‘It would prevent my having to talk to that dreadful man. And I should enjoy things so much more with you there. Why not get your cousins to bring you? It could be managed so easily.’

From pondering Lottie's strange remark anent respectability, Enid had come to discern a grain of sound sense in it.

‘With Mr. Calderon?—no, thank you!’ cried Boyne fervently. The thought of Calderon's superb manhood daunted him. He dared not tempt the comparison. But Enid thought his pious shiver bespoke dislike of the squire of Hamford, and inwardly thanked him for espousing her cause so warmly.

Thenceforth she did not fear to meet him as of old, though always keeping Lottie with her in the foreground. He occupied so much of her thoughts that she began to fancy she must be in love with him. She fell to studying herself. In the space of a few days she seemed to live through ages of experience, as is the privilege of young minds rapt in contemplation of their own nascent personality as of a bud

perceptibly bursting. The fragrance of the flower he was instrumental in opening disposed her to think gently of Sidney Boyne.

Thus matters stood at the date of the garden-party and dance given to celebrate the arrival of Ruth's betrothed at Ditchley Abbey.

CHAPTER VI

THE FUSE IS LIT

By four o'clock the gardens began to flow with straw-hatted, sunburnt men, and flower-like women. Set deep in old trees and walled about with clipped hedges and shrubberies, the smooth lawns, almost level with the gravel paths, had the look of green carpets spread creaseless on a tawny floor. In like manner the flower-beds were as imposed rugs of divers colours. Just above the tree-tufts a line of summer clouds crept along the sky like a procession of snow-white snails.

Mrs. Garland, as formal hostess, stood surrounded by ladies not far from a French window by which guests emerged from the house. Simon Glover flitted from group to group with an ear for each new announcement made by the footman-usher, silk-stockinged and powdered to boot, from the steps of the garden-room.

Enid held rather conspicuously aloof, leaning against the pedestal of a great sculptured vase brimming over with begonias which adorned a corner of the croquet-lawn, a velvet plat beneath the west wall of the house as yet untrodden of the visitors.

She watched the growing crowd moodily. Several parsons, and a few dowagers clad in black, spotted the bright array like crows in an assemblage of pigeons. Presently one of those dark figures detached itself from the swarm and walked boldly across the croquet-ground to Enid, who straightened at its approach. It was Mr. Freely, vicar of the parish.

‘Miss Enid, you lean like patience on a monument: is it to make that virtue desired of every bachelor?’ he asked with a little bow and a smile as she extended her hand. ‘I have long been wanting to ask you about Lottie Heaviland. I hope she is doing well.’

‘She’s a dear!’ replied Enid with conviction.

‘She has grown a strikingly pretty girl,’ the vicar went on; ‘and has the manners of a lady, thanks to association with some one I know. . . . What a number of people!—all the countryside. And how the dresses shine in this trim old garden! Yours is like a bit of the sky transferred to this nether region of deep greens and greys. I was here once in June when the windows on this side were framed in wistaria and banksia-roses, a posy from lawn to roof. . . . I don’t see the Vellums anywhere?’

‘I know they are coming and will stay for the ball to-night.’

‘What gaiety!’ interjected the parson, with a whimsical smile.

‘They are going to bring with them a personage,’ Enid continued with a hint of disdain, ‘we have always intensely disliked—Mr. Calderon: do you know him?’

‘I should think I do! His father and mine were old friends, and when I left Oxford I tutored young Hugh for a couple of years before he went to Harrow. He was a backward boy then and considered delicate. But now he’s health itself. You mustn’t dislike Hugh! I wouldn’t mind betting you five shillings you’ll have changed your mind about him before this time to-morrow.’

Enid’s lips were pursed to express a decided negative till they parted in laughter as she caught Mr. Freely mimicking their by-play. He was a friend of hers, and she liked talking to him.

But their shell of privacy was broken by an irruption of her father, imposing in a grey frock-coat and a white waist-coat, with a dark carnation at his button-hole. He strode with head bent in contemplation of his patent-leather toes,

and hands clasped at his back. The fact of his wearing no hat proclaimed him at home, but he felt like a visitor on sufferance—an uneasiness he strove to cloak by shaking hands markedly with people and bidding them welcome.

‘My dear vicar!’ he exclaimed as he drew near, raising his eyes and producing a hand from his back. ‘I’ve been looking for you. Glad to see that one of my family has been doing the polite. Gentlemen of your cloth are always particularly welcome at my house. I am a staunch churchman, sir, as was my father before me. It’s with pride I see so many of the clergy round me here to-day—ten or a dozen I think I’ve counted. Now I want to introduce you to Mr. Calderon who is just arriving with the Vellums.’

‘I shall be happy to meet Hugh Calderon, sir; but there is really no need of an introduction.’ With a deprecating bow to Enid the vicar submitted to be led away.

As she strolled across the green to join a cloud of girls enveloping Ruth, Enid saw Sir Charles and Lady Vellum and their four smiling daughters issue from the house, followed shortly by Mr. Randal Vellum, at whose side walked a distinguished-looking man of middle height clad in navy blue and carrying a straw hat. In the distance she could only see that the stranger was fair and that his face was tanned.

Ruth’s dress was under admiration in the group she now approached. A few snatches of the dialogue, as ‘Look at the frills!’—‘And the fluting!’—‘It’s exquisite!’—‘A perfect dream!’—‘It must have cost pounds!’ sufficed, and she swerved away. Many ladies bowed to her, and she exchanged greetings with some whom she did not remember to have seen before, but who seemed to think themselves on affectionate terms with her.

The first constraint of welcome and introduction passed from the scene; groups were no longer stationary; there was a constant flow of traffic from one to another, and whole tribes were in motion viewing the wonders of the place. Waiters with trays of refreshment darted in and out of the

house and across the sward. Games of croquet and tennis were in progress. Women, tall and short, clad in fair colours, with hueless males in attendance, moved among the dull greens beneath the blue sky. Mr. Freely again met her. 'What, always alone!' he cried; and forthwith insisted on her sitting down with him to one of the little tables scattered in the shade, and partaking of refreshments whereof he declared himself sore in need. But the cheery parson was in great request. Other friends presently claimed him; and Enid, having finished her tea, became once more a damsel errant.

The lawn towards the house was so crowded that it was at unawares Enid came upon her father, who was sauntering with Sir Charles Vellum and Mr. Calderon. They three walked foremost of an assortment of guests on their way to inspect the greenhouses. Of all the local bigwigs Sir Charles was he with whom Simon Glover had most in common. Avid of money, his point of view on life was not remote from that of his present host, whose fortune he gravely respected. Enid looked at him, whom she knew, in preference to Mr. Calderon, whom she neither knew nor wished to know, and who was looking rather hard at her.

'Enid!' cried her father. 'Come here!—Mr. Calderon, permit me to introduce my youngest daughter—Enid.'

Obliged to hold out her hand, she felt it prisoned for an instant in a strong grasp that was yet no pressure. A pair of grey eyes met hers for the same space. They were discriminating, a little humorous, very honest. What annoyed her at this trivial juncture was their steadfastness like a claim to mastery. She failed to catch his words, she certainly said nothing in reply, and he soon passed on. Yet his look remained along with a feeling of release.

She heard Sir Charles say, evidently picking up a previous thread of talk:

'I quite agree with you, Glover. Every young man should be trained to make money, if only that he may learn the value of it. Here's a case in point. The son of a cousin

of mine, Sidney Boyne by name—you may have met him about; he lives at one of the Hedgehams—was brought up by his mother to do nothing but loaf, and he's taken to scribbling poetry and stuff. He has three hundred a year and he earns nothing'—Sir Charles with a gesture pointed the obvious moral—'and what's more, the chap seems to be going off his head. He lives quite alone and never goes out into society. It's a year since I last saw him.'

Enid's cheeks burned so that she longed to be hid, sure that people must notice her confusion and ask what ailed her. Her contempt of Sir Charles Vellum's judgment on his kinsman knew no bounds.

'How are you, Enid?' came a voice from behind her. 'I'm looking for Ruth; where is she? After that I shall try for some tea.'

Turning with a start she beheld the scrupulously correct face and figure of Captain Kenneth Stoke. He had but that moment arrived. Enid smiled cordially at shaking hands.

'Ruth was over there just now,' she told him, nodding to where a deodar rose to a dark taper-point against a sky already warming to sunset.

It occurred to her that Lord Elmsdale must also have arrived, for Kenneth and his lordship had fixed on the same train. She would have asked her sister's lover, but he was lost in the moving throng which grew shadowy as the sun dipped in the west.

Pleasant memories of the last visit of Mrs. Garland's brother, a year ago, kept her near the house in hopes of meeting that round-faced nobleman. Presently a flunkey passed her, bearing a thin terra-cotta coloured envelope honourably upon a salver.

'A telegram for Mrs. Garland, Miss,' he proffered in response to her raised eyebrows.

A slight but sensible hush spread with the passage of the silver tray. Enid, following, saw Mrs. Garland rend the covering, unfold the flimsy grey sheet within, and smile as she turned to Mr. Glover who was standing near.

‘H’m—h’m—I regret to say, ladies and gentlemen, that Viscount Elmsdale has been unavoidably detained in London and cannot join us here to-day,’ old Simon gave forth with unction. ‘He says: “Expect me any time after to-morrow” and “Don’t trouble to meet me!” Very considerate of his lordship. A charming fellow! Are you acquainted with him, Mr. Calderon?’

‘I was at school with him,’ came in answer on a chuckle full of reminiscence.

‘Ah, indeed? Then let me hope that you will favour him and me with your company out shooting one of these days. I don’t shoot personally, but I like watching the sport. And we preserve largely on the estate; I employ six gamekeepers. They tell me birds are very plentiful this season.’

One or two ladies called attention to the beauty of the western sky which was now all aflame, the trees trenching like a cloud upon it. Shapes of the crowd flitted in silhouette over turf which, between their shadows, had a faint sheen as if sprinkled with gold dust. Windows of the mansion caught the level beams and blazed afar. Steps were muffled on the soft grass; speech and laughter rang out almost strident, so much were form and motion attuned to the hour’s fervour. Colours of dresses were faint, broadly outlined in black like figures in an old church-window.

Clergy-people and others who were not staying for the dance began now to take leave. Beyond the thick hedges carriage-wheels were heard to crunch on gravel.

To avoid scramble and crowding, dinner was served informally and by two instalments: at half-past six for the ladies, who thus had plenty of leisure to dress afterwards; at a quarter-past seven for the gentlemen, whose raiment took less time. Every available chamber was turned into a dressing-room for the nonce. Enid, running upstairs after a scamped meal, found the lighted corridor a-bustle with strange tirewomen. Her sitting-room was given over to the four Miss Vellums, while their mother robed in Lottic’s

little bedchamber. Mrs. Garland had done her best to tone down and civilise Mr. Glover's original crude plan of entertainment; and it redounded much to her credit that there was no confusion, and but very little grumbling on the part of the visitors.

It being the first dance in which Enid had ever participated as a grown-up person, she was naturally excited as, fresh and perfect from Lottie's fingers, she descended the great staircase, touching the banister with one hand while the other gathered up her dress. The stir in the hall and the many new faces of waiters hired for the occasion made it all unhomelike.

An apartment known as the banqueting-hall, wainscotted throughout in oak, was the ball-room. It boasted a famous ceiling of the eighteenth century, showing plaster cornucopia, cherubs, fruit and vegetables writhing intricate in low relief around a kind of overgrown Tudor rose from the centre of which depended a bulky chandelier. About a hundred candles in these hanging branches with groups of two and three on brackets along the walls gave a plenitude of light which had reflection in the smooth panels, as in water, and made a dazzle of the polished floor. At each end an escutcheoned mantelpiece of carven stone bestrode a hearth full now of hot-house flowers in pots. Palms and bushy plants screened each corner, forming lounges much to be preferred to the stiffness of the chairs lining the walls.

Enid was down early. The musicians had not yet come to take their seats in the bay of the great oriel window, high like a dais. Only a few ladies and gentlemen stood talking to Mrs. Garland under the central light. Feeling no desire to swell that group, she made her shoe-buckle a pretext to withdraw to a corner. She had stooped down close by the screen of palms ere she knew that the nook beyond was occupied by some men, part of whose colloquy she could not help overhearing.

One was saying: 'He's a rank outsider, an unmitigated snob! Did you hear him read out that telegram from Lord

Elmsdale? . . . How old Vellum can put up with him I don't know! They seem as thick as thieves. . . . Poor Calderon! I saw you being lugged about with them and pitied you, old chap, as I should pity a living sacrifice.' The answer came carelessly: 'Your pity was wasted. There's nothing to quarrel with in our host. I find him well-meaning, quite inoffensive—I must own to being rather smitten with the younger daughter, the glimpse I had of her.'

'A fine girl,' said some one else confirmatorily.

Enid shrank away as though she had been stung. Mr. Calderon's languid approval of her person atoned no more than did his lukewarm defence of her father for his part in so atrocious a dialogue. Considering the generosity of her father in consenting to overlook his past insult, by which alone he was here to-night, it seemed to her a crime against the laws of hospitality that he had not challenged the first speaker. She was furious with him for not smiting the wretch, for not flying at his throat and strangling him there and then. The groan and squeak of tuning fiddles sided with her displeasure like a voice. The flush and pose of indignation became her so royally that, the room beginning to fill, men flew bowing for leave to write their names on her programme.

With the tail of her eye she saw three gentlemen emerge from the hateful corner; slinking, mean figures they seemed to her distempered sight. The next minute Mr. Calderon stood before her. His easy confidence was disgusting. It raised her mettle against him.

'May I have the pleasure of waltzing with you?'

'I think not,' said Enid without a look.

'Don't you waltz? Then let it be a polka—The Lancers, if you will. Only do take pity on me!'

She shook her head.

'Your programme is filled?' he pursued, with a change of tone.

'Oh no.'

'Then why won't you dance with me?'

‘Because I don’t wish to, thank you.’

She shot a glance of disdain into his eyes that could leave him no doubt as to her meaning.

The whipped pride flamed in his cheeks and flashed for a second from his eyes. Then his lip curled a little, and she turned aside, fearing reprisals. He hung a moment speechless, then strode off in dudgeon.

There was no repentance of her rudeness. Rather, she gloried in knowing that she had succeeded in administering a stab to that masterful, stuck-up person. There was no one in the world she so delighted to hate. It seemed she was born to detest him, that he had been formed expressly for her loathing.

The orchestra was going in tune by this time, and Enid revolving in the clutch of a jerky partner, full six-foot tall, whose platitudes she capped by rote. The scene, when she enjoyed a moment’s respite to inhale it, reminded her of a Christmas picture from some old journal which had been used to hang on the wall of her nursery. Hugh Calderon lived and she lived, by the force of a hatred which was somehow answerable for all the stir and hubbub in the dazzling ballroom.

The Vellums left about midnight, her aversion with them. No one of that party sought to bid her farewell. Her father, who escorted them to the carriages, found his daughter afterwards in the conservatory.

‘Enid, I have something to say when you can spare me a few minutes.’

‘All right, papa, I’ll come at once,’ she replied, towering with presentiments of the interview. With a bow to her cavalier she took her father’s arm and was led away to his study, used as a supplementary cloak-room. Having shut the door behind them, Simon Glover broke out:

‘Sir Charles tells me you have offended Mr. Calderon—were very rude to him; he saw you. . . . What does it mean, eh? . . . Are my guests to be insulted under my own roof by my own children, and no reason given? He’s one o’ the

first gentlemen in the country, let me tell you. He thinks of putting up for Parliament at the next election.'

'Now I see why he came here,' said Enid bitterly.

'What's that? I don't understand you. . . . Why did you refuse to dance with him?'

The old tradesman was not warm without a cause. By means of that young man, whom Sir Charles Vellum had made no slight favour of bringing to the Abbey, poor Simon had hoped to scramble through the thorn-hedge of an exclusive circle in the county, to enter which he was as keen as ever fairy-prince to win to sleeping-beauty. But it was above all the imputation of ill-breeding which riled him.

At Enid's calm and, as he thought, impudent rejoinder of 'I can't tell you, papa,' he finally lost control and stormed at her, shaking his fist and stamping, making such a commotion in the small room that a hat slipped from off a pile of coats and rolled to his feet. Enid stood affrighted, shrinking from him, staring as at a ghastly apparition. Never in her life had she known this metamorphosis of the urbane man of business, her father, wont to be all indulgence.

'I'll teach you, girl! My friends shall not be insulted by any chit of a child! . . . I won't have my house get a bad name through your manners. . . . After all the pounds I've spent on you! . . . Go to your room at once, do you hear?—and stay there on bread and water till you come on your knees and apologise!'

He flung wide the door and made as if he would hurl her forth, hissing low for fear of listeners: 'I'll see I'm master in my own house!'

Enid fled, tongue-tied, a singing in her ears.

In her own room she fell headlong on the bed. She strove to cry but could not, the tragedy was too deep.

At length she got up, possessed with one burning thought; to escape from that house and all contained in it. She had one, only one friend left in the world. How dear he now

seemed! How sweet his devotion! How had she ever resisted the prayer of his love!

Searching, she found a sheet of note-paper, and wrote on it with a toy pencil torn off the programme still dangling from her wrist:—

‘Sidney, I love you. Take me at once right away from this hateful Ditchley. Appoint a time and place for me to meet you.—E. G.

‘*P.S.*—I shall bring my maid.’

Then she rang the bell.

CHAPTER VII

DEMENTIA

LOTTIE, merry from a carousal in the housekeeper's room, froze at sight of Enid's pale face and burning eyes in such tragic contrast with her ball-dress and the music still throbbing below-stairs. She had deemed herself called to repair some slight damage of apparel, a torn frill or strip of lace.

The toneless calm with which Enid related what had happened, and propounded her wild plan of escape, imposed on Lottie. It all seemed predestined, inevitable.

'O my dear Miss Enid! I am so sorry! . . . But hadn't you better wait till we can think. . . .'

Enid's eyes silenced her, making the words a vain babble to be ashamed of. And Lottie cared not for herself. She would have followed her mistress through fire and water, was ready to break every tie of duty and affection for her sake, she so loved her. To atone for her moment's hesitation, she volunteered to slip out in the early morning and give the note to a carrier who passed by one of the lodges, with instructions to leave it at Mr. Boyne's house. Thanks to her knowledge of the countryside, Enid was able to add a few words appointing a rendezvous. On the day after to-morrow, if he consented, she would be there without fail at 4 P.M. Mr. Boyne was prayed to send his answer—bare Yes or No—by the returning carrier whom Lottie undertook to waylay again in the evening.

Then Enid undressed and donned her night-robe. As soon as Lottie was gone she locked her bedroom door. She

was glad of the precaution about an hour later when a fit of dry sobbing was stilled by a knock and the voice of Mrs. Garland :

‘ Enid ! . . . Enid, love ! . . . Are you awake ? ’

The girl held her breath. On the call being repeated, she made her voice sleepy and fretful to ask :

‘ Who is it ? What do you want ? ’

‘ If you’re resting I won’t disturb you. I feared you might be wakeful, that is all. Good-night, dear ! ’

With relief she heard the sound of footsteps die in the empty corridors.

Next day saw the nadir of Enid’s self-respect. Her disgrace was public in the house ; all the servants knew it. She heard them whisper and giggle in the passage by her door. Pent all day long in one room, there was nothing to distract her mind from its own wretchedness.

Out of doors the weather was like April. Once when a shower blinded the outlook, she caught herself counting raindrops as they slid down the rim of a gutter-pipe, and the effort seemed a burden in her life. She could see herself, a small child, leaning on the parapet of a railway-arch, intent to count the trucks of a luggage-train passing beneath ; lying awake at night counting sheep as they jumped one by one over a gate ; counting the days that must elapse till Christmas, her birthday or some other desired period. What was all life but a telling of beads in the dark, a counting of days towards something unknown which might never befall. The surprising herself in so futile yet familiar a pastime, the infinite suggestiveness of such aimless numberings, made her distress resound as the fall of a drop wakes echoes in a cave of darkness.

Every one was forbidden access to her save Lottie, who brought her prison fare at the appointed hours. Mr. Glover had issued strict injunctions that upon no pretext should Enid come downstairs, that her diet, until she should think fit to repent, should be nothing but bread and water. When Mrs. Garland ventured to contest the wisdom of this drastic

treatment of a full-grown maiden, he turned so red and harsh, that for fear of indignity she inclined to his will, though resolved to use her own discretion when it came to interpreting orders.

Time crawled, a wingless thing. Enid loathed the sluggish apathy of seconds, minutes, hours, ages.

At length, at the gloaming, Lottie came to her with red cheeks, hair rather blown about, and a scared look in her eyes. She reeked of the evening mist and panted as from a race.

‘Well?’ questioned Enid, a statue of expectation.

‘The carrier’s word was Yes, Miss.’

The lines of Enid’s face relaxed, her head drooped, her figure from being rigid sank to melting curves. Lottie knew that she was crying, but would not irk her pride by seeming to heed. As it was dusk she busied herself in drawing the window-curtains and lighting candles. At length she thought she might risk a word.

‘How about your luggage, Miss? I can’t see how we’re going to smuggle a trunk out of the house. . . . And there’s my box too. . . . Oh, we must give it up. It can’t anyhow be done.’ Her brain was nearly normal, while Enid’s, for all her pale composure, was on fire, a volcano under snow.

Enid sprang up stiff again, clenched hands straining her pendant arms like weights.

‘It must be done. . . . I can’t live through another day like this. I can do with a very little—a handbag.’

‘That you can’t and won’t, Miss!’ Lottie flared up. ‘’Twould be a sin and a shame. . . . Whatever would folks be saying? . . . If you hold to that, Miss, I shan’t go with you, and I’ll go straight and tell Mrs. Garland. I can’t think o’ your doin’ it, and I wouldn’t do it myself. I should think shame to take a journey without proper things. . . . The idea!’

It was the first time in their relations that Lottie had shown a dominant spirit. Enid stood aghast at the rebellion.

But the sense of helplessness precluded anger. Her hot forehead held no brain at all.

‘Let me think,’ said Lottie, fingering her chin.

As a sop to her draggled pride Enid murmured weakly : ‘I don’t know why I should listen to you. You’re only a month older.’ She sighed resignedly.

After long pondering, Lottie could only think of one way, and that risky. It was to ask one of her blindest admirers to have a wheelbarrow in readiness at a drowsy hour of the morning. She trusted to her own young arms to convey the trunks singly to the top of the back stairs without waking any one. There the accomplice, who must have his boots off, could relieve her.

A resident stable-boy was in her mind, who hailed from Ditchley village. Him she might well beguile with hints of an untold difference with Mrs. Garland entailing immediate departure. She would bind the lad to secrecy and afterwards, in the course of the morning, find occasion to tell him that Mrs. Garland had taken her once more into favour, so she was stopping on after all. She and Enid must escape in the afternoon, when they were used to walk out together, and no one seeing them would be surprised. The bumpkin abounded in phlegm ; he would give up the riddle of her vagaries and resign himself, as he had to other senseless and vexatious phenomena such as flies in summer, poppies in corn, rats and mice in the stables.

Warming to the task of elaboration, she began to see a measure of fun in the escapade. So only that it made Enid happy, she cared not what others might say or think. When the scandal broke she would be far away, at peace, with Enid.

It took longer to hit on a destination for the boxes, some place where they could lie unremarked until, in the ripeness of the plot, Mr. Boyne could fetch them with a conveyance. This puzzle was agitating Lottie even while she bestirred herself to turn over the contents of a wardrobe and chest of drawers ; Enid hovering round her feverishly, choosing

garments and then repudiating the same as at a loss to select.

She thought of her own home, of the thatched lodge, of the railway-station, to reject each summarily. Beyond the meeting with Mr. Boyne, nothing was definite. For aught she knew, the loving couple might drive all the way to London. Tales she had read of elopement in a post-chaise recurred to her vividly, pictures of a carriage rocking in a cloud of dust, a desperate face at the window, and a host of pursuers gaining upon it Gilpin-wise. She had never dared hope to partake in such high flights.

At length there arose in her mind the wraith of a wayside inn, nigh two miles from any village, an inn standing back from the road with a wide rutted space before it, its sign of the Red Cow, almost hidden in the leaves of an old sycamore. It was not far from the trysting-place, and the landlord was a Heaviland, a plethoric, imperturbable old kinsman of hers, who had always been thought to favour her in his stolid way. His nature was unquestioning, she thought. He would accept the boxes and yield them up again as mere facts, and pleasant facts for afterthought should silver come of them. To the Cow then they should be trundled.

With the dispassionate calm of a Fate she went on her errand of temptation. Her victim might lose his place and the character servants prize as their immortal soul: it in no way concerned her. Enid, just as inconsiderate, passed the time in continuing the work begun by Lottie. In this she used circumspection, first bolting the door against surprise.

The knock apprehended came shortly. Enid had closed the wardrobe door and was shoving the box into a corner, ere, recognising Lottie's voice, she flew to loose the bolt.

‘Well, what does he say?’

‘I haven’t seen him, Miss Enid. I was looking for him when I saw Miles——’

Enid's impatience rang out a bell-note: 'Miles?'

'Miles, Miss! He knows all about it, and he says he'll help. He offered before I said a word. It seems he's in the pay of Mr. Boyne. . . . I never did take to that Miles.'

Enid clasped her hands in a kind of spasm. 'Oh, we can't have him! It's too low, too utterly degrading! . . . Besides, how can I trust a man I know to be false? He's just as likely to betray us.'

'I don't think that, Miss,' said Lottie after brief consideration. 'I think he'd lose more than he'd gain by peaching. . . . There's the saying, "All's fair in love." No doubt Mr. Boyne was kind in his intending and wished to save you trouble. And so long as you get safe and wedded to him you love, I don't suppose you care much what way it is. I shouldn't, I don't think; but then I've never been what you'd call wholly in love. . . . Dear, if you're really set on going, I believe he's as serviceable a man as you could wish for. . . . But ugh! the start it gave me when he caught my arm in that dark corner by the coach-house. It was like the shadow o' death, Miss, if you can fancy that. . . .'

Enid did not speak for a minute. Under colour of arranging some things upon her dressing-table, she kept her face averted. Her breath came with difficulty. She wished to look on Mr. Boyne as scarcely less her servant than Lottie in the undertaking.

That talk of love and marriage daunted her, disturbing the veil she kept drawn over the future. She chose to see nothing definite beyond the first adventure.

They reckoned up their resources in money, which were sufficiently vast, thanks to some bank-notes Uncle Steve had given Enid wherewith to buy a necklace. The scruple she would commonly have felt in diverting the gift from its specified purpose was lost sight of amid the bonfire of scruples like a lamp in a burning house.

Lottie was called away to her supper, and did not reappear till bedtime, having her own work of packing to do.

Left alone, Enid paced the room, her brain seething, her mouth dry with excitement. After a while, craving air, she threw up the window, and kneeling, with elbows on the sill, looked out.

The moon hung above the woods like a falling golden coin which never fell. Small clouds flitted across the luminary, revealing, concealing roguishly, like the play of a fan. The smooth stretches of the park were mouse-colour. Along the drive some young trees her father had planted for a future avenue amused her with their present likeness to the spades in a pack of cards. For the first time in her prison the world of grass and trees invited her. A suffusion of tenderness brought tears, which trickled down her cheeks, and yet she was not crying.

Presently, as she knelt thus, a sound of wheels came from the direction of the stables. It grew louder and louder, then ceased altogether, the vehicle drawing up at the hall-door, and she heard the ring of harness and a horse pawing restively. A projecting gable prevented her seeing aught of what passed, but she heard her father's voice raised in hearty farewell, to which some one made polite rejoinder; and the noise of wheels grinding gravel began anew.

A dog-cart appeared, drawn by a frisky horse just breaking into a trot, the figure of a groom perched with folded arms beside the driver. She had not known that a visitor was to come, Lottie even had not mentioned it. It sounded the gulf which had yawned since yesternight.

'Who has been dining here?' she asked, when Lottie came at last to prepare her for bed.

'Mr. Calderon, Miss. I didn't like to mention it.'

'That hateful man again!'

'He drove up about five o'clock, time you were lying down. . . . Your father's in a wonderful good temper by what the men were saying at supper. Perhaps he'll make it up with you after all.'

Enid smiled in the air, implying that there were two

parties to the reconciliation. The picture of her father recounting her punishment to Mr. Calderon over the wine, and the twain with Kenneth laughing at her indignities, set her blood raging anew. Not until long after did she learn that her name had not once been mentioned.

CHAPTER VIII

HOW LOTTIE HEAVILAND CAME TO FAIL ENID IN THE HOUR OF NEED

THE free air tasted delicious to Enid when, out of breath from a rush across the open park, she stood with Lottie in the first shade of the woods and from that covert looked back, meeting the breeze. The sky shone clear and blue between soft masses of dove-coloured cloud which trailed great shadows across the wide expanse of sward dotted with hawthorn-trees and browsing cattle. Her cheeks were rosy, her bosom heaved with excitement.

Everything had happened to favour their enterprise. Their luggage awaited them by this time at the house of Lottie's kinsman; and Mrs. Garland had connived at their breaking prison for an hour's wholesome exercise while the ogre enjoyed his accustomed nap after lunch.

Having made sure that no one followed, the truants took the path through the wood more leisurely. The whisper of the trees sounded refreshing as a calm sea's lisp along the sand. Birds twittered on all sides. From a sunny dell, fringed with bracken, rabbits scuttled at their approach, bobbing white tails. Enid, invigorated, strove hard to exult in the escape. To that end she thought:

'How pleased Sidney will be to get me! He will be so grateful that he will do whatever I wish. I wonder where we shall go! . . . How jolly it will be to travel with him! . . . Here's an end to humiliations. . . .'

But try as she would she could not manage to view herself in the light of a free and joyful agent, but felt all the while

as one on a steep slide, a missile of circumstance, powerless to stop herself.

They had won clear of the plantations, and were treading a familiar path through reaped cornfields, with the windmill turning placid sails before them against the sky, when Lottie broke the silence, faltering :

‘We’ve got plenty of time, Miss. Would you mind me running home for ten minutes. I should like to kiss mother, though, of course, I’d tell her nothing of what we’re up to. And there’s a few things I should like to get together and take with me. You see, Miss, there’s no saying how long we shall be away.’

‘What did you say?’ said Enid, awakening from a kind of trance.

Lottie had to repeat her request.

‘Oh yes, certainly, go if you like! Only don’t be too long or I shall get anxious. I’ll walk on slowly to the place. You can catch me up.’

They parted on the brow of the hill overlooking the village street, immersed with the marshes in berylline haze. A footpath diagonally traversing a field of beet ran thence down to within a stone’s throw of Will Heaviland’s cottage, where it abutted on the road by a stile in a blackthorn hedge. At the stile Lottie turned to wave a hand, but Enid was then gone out of sight.

The cottage was a pleasant sight with its weatherbeaten, ruddy face contrasting the little garden bright with asters. But how she could ever have endured existence there for seventeen years was a marvel!

Her mother came round the brick path from the back, clacking in pattens, her bare arms steaming, and Lottie remembered it was washing-day, a weekly festival as immutable and exacting as the Jew’s Sabbath.

Mrs. Heaviland was first of all for scuttling at sight of a fine lady opening her gate; but recognising her offspring she refrained, and burst into exclamation, setting arms akimbo : ‘Well, I never! Hew’d ha’ thought to see yow here? Got

a arternoon off? Well, ye're welcome, but I be high busy as yow may see for yerself and might ha' knowed. I can't attend t' ye, but yow'll find yer brother Chris i' the room. He ha' met with a accident as yow may ha' heerd, for they tell me some un put a tidy bit i' the *Angle* about it and that were in ta Jarnal tew for ta matter o' that. 'Twere a stingy hoss let out at un and broke his rib. So he ha' been on the club five weeks come Tuesday next, and seemly 'ont be to wark again this side o' Micklemist; and for all a fare that hearty in hisself he marn't dew a stroke o' wark up o' the 'lotmen' case o' some un peachin' on un. 'Tis right ridickerlus, I call it—Well, I'm sure!'

This last was a tribute to the smart appearance of her daughter, whose raiment she had scanned and assimilated while speaking.

Some previous word of the accident had reached Lottie, but she had heard it lightly, having been used all her life to associate Christmas with scrapes. Annoyance at finding him at home took the heart from her condolence. Chris was so inquisitive; he was sure to ask questions and wonder at her unsociable haste to be off. It all spelt delay, and Enid was waiting.

He looked shockingly common in his black Sabbath suit, emblematic of leisure, a grey flannel shirt with dirty wristbands, and a red kerchief knotted round his purple neck by way of collar. She hated kissing him. The room too, for which Mrs. Heaviland was wont to claim that you could take your dinner off the floor without shame or disgrace, was offensive by its very cleanness. It smelt of scrubbing and roused antagonism like a woman loud in her virtue. Now she was there Lottie wished herself away. However, she put the best face on the matter, listening with a show of deep interest while Christmas detailed his mishap.

'Mother,' she called at length, 'I want to get together a few things o' mine. That's really why I came down. If you've some brown paper and a bit o' string you could let me have, I should be obliged.'

Her mother, not without grumbling, fulfilled her requirement; and Lottie went upstairs, bumping toes at every step, the foothold was so narrow and the ascent so steep, to her old chamber where was a locker containing all such property of hers as she had not chosen to take with her to service. She was kneeling on the yellow boards, hurriedly ransacking this personal store, when Christmas came stumping up after her.

‘Tain’t often I get a sight on ye, old mawther,’ he remarked affectionately, and sat down on the single chair to watch her rummaging. She was obliged to smile on him.

‘Wa, God love me if that be’ant poor Granny’s watch what she left ye!’ he presently exclaimed, in a manner of expostulation. ‘Yow be never a-goin’ to take that there! That sarve no mander o’ use to tell time by; ’tis but a warth o’ the case. And yow ha’n’t no cause to sell nawthun wi’ the wages yow dew ’arn. . . . Yow be’ant never a-goin’ to lug that there vallyble thing up to th’ Abbey!’

‘Oh yes, I am indeed, Chris!’ Lottie snapped out, colouring hotly.

‘Well, that’s a rum un and no mistake! Yow fare to be makin’ what some’d call a clean sweep o’ that there chest. Come now, what’s the game?’

‘That’s my business!’ she retorted; realising her silliness the next moment when he rose from the chair, fierce with suspicion, and came and stood over her.

‘Yow shan’t leave this here chamber till yow told me: mind that! I know where ’tis, there’s a chap in it—that chap I cotched ye with—else yow’d ha’ telled me fast enow. Yow shan’t go till father ha’ seed and spoke to ye, that’s sarten sure.’

Her silence and encrimsoned cheeks confirming his guess, he left her and tramped resolutely down stairs. While employed in tying up her parcel she could hear him moving in the room beneath, opening and shutting a cupboard door, and saying words to her mother who appeared to remonstrate. Then to her dismay came a slam of the staircase-

door and the fumble of a key in the lock, which turned at length.

Never in her life had she known that door made fast. The key had lain, for as long as she could remember, rusty and disregarded on the floor of a cupboard. The Old Man himself must have inspired Christmas.

A vision of her mistress alone and unsupported at the trysting-place came to madden her. Without her, Enid would not know what to do about the luggage and, which was far more serious, her good name would be utterly at Mr. Boyne's mercy.

She went to the casement with half a mind to jump out, but the sheerness of the drop daunted her; while the unconcerned, familiar view, the marshlands melting from green into blue, the poplars like tall feathers, and the wooded rise beyond, mocked her impotence as with a sneer.

Standing there, she saw Christmas step out through the garden, swinging open the gate which clanged behind him. He thrust hands in his trouser-pockets and went off down the road with the slight rollick proper to an invalid. Foul words she had heard men use flew in her brain as stones hurled at the very thought of him.

She pulled out the little watch Enid had given her for a birthday present. It wanted but twenty minutes of the appointed hour. Clambering down the stairway she tried the door as a forlorn hope, then shouted to her mother:

'I must get back! I shall lose my place! Miss Enid's waiting! Turn the key, mother, there's a love! It's getting more than a joke. Oh dear, I shall lose my place, I tell you!'

Mrs. Heaviland came hurriedly from the back-house, and Lottie could smell soapsuds in spite of the door between. She wailed: 'My dear, I can't dew nawthun. I can't help ye and more's the pity! That there Chris ha' took and put ta key in his pocket; I see un wi' these eyes. He be a master-Roossian, be your brother Chris.'

'I tell you it's important, I must get out! I've got to

join Miss Enid at four o'clock, and 'tis now a quarter to. Get a poker and break the lock. I'll pay the mending.'

'Hark to the gel! Whatever dew yow think I be made on! . . . And to think it should ha' fell on a washin'-day o' all days! . . . Break the lock indeed! That's just like yer dear father, he allus expect a woman to be jack-o'-all-trades. . . . Break the door indeed! I never did dew ut, and I be'ant a-goin' to begin at this time o' day; 'tain't likely!'

Lottie looked again at her watch. What would Miss Enid think of her! She sank on the stairs. Her frame of mind was that prostration by adversity which for most girls brings its own relief in tears. The case grew more desperate with every tick of the grandfather's clock out there in the living-room where she would be.

'Mother! mother!' she cried of a sudden, springing erect. 'Try the key of your store-cupboard!'

Mrs. Heaviland who had returned to the back-house, came forth again exclaiming 'Bless the gel!' with the irritation of one disturbed by vain clamour in the performance of a solemn rite. 'I'll try it, just to content ye; but that 'ont be no mander o' use!'

'Lor' bless my soul and body!' she ejaculated next minute when Lottie bounced out, kissed her repeatedly and darted off, fleet as a deer. The parcel, end and object of her visit, was left behind, but she gave no thought to it.

On she sped, the hedgerows leading an excited dance around her, the breeze that swept the upland trilling in her ears. The sky was bright, seeming both blue and green to her eyes, and yet the land was shadowed. Ragweed, harebells, and pale toadflax burned in the tawny grass like glowworms in the night.

In a field her path skirted were some men and horses ploughing. She slackened her pace from a wish to pass them unconcernedly. One ploughman who stood by the handle of his implement filling a pipe preparatory to tracing a new furrow was almost in her way. His horses, a pair of

rugged shaggy monsters, with tender eyes and sleek flanks richly gleaming, were cast with the plough in one bronze group of patience. She knew him well.

‘Wa, Lottie my dear, where be yow off tew in sich a mortal hurry?’

She replied as sedately as she could, being short of breath: ‘Good afternoon, Mr. Forman. I’m going to Hilton to fetch my mistress who’s gone there visiting.’

‘Wa, to be sure now! ’Tis a nice day for a outin’. Now I surmudged as how yow was takin’ a outin’ when I seed ye mount the stile hinder. I was thinkin’ o’ hollerin’ as much to my partner yonder——’ With the stem of his pipe he indicated a fellow-labourer steering his active plough with the nicety one has in threading a needle. ‘So yow be off to Hilton . . .’

But with a curt ‘Good-bye’ Lottie was gone, and the ploughman, having shaken his head in the direction of her flight, struck the match he had held in abeyance during the interview on the backside of his corduroys, laid it to the bowl of his pipe, and called ‘Gee-wup!’ to the horses, which strained forward at the word as automata when a spring is touched.

Lottie reached the trysting-place to find it absolutely deserted. A lonely spot had purposely been chosen, but its loneliness had never been quite so obvious as at that moment. She leaned on a gate, feeling rather faint.

She was in a bend of one of those lanes with wide green margents and copse-like hedges, which tell of a bounteous time when space was not economised as it is nowadays. The turf bore a fresh wheelmark in one place showing that some vehicle had turned there very recently. Lottie, recovering, noticed this trace and hung over it with the intentness of a backwoodsman.

The carriage had turned, therefore it had not gone to Elmondham which lay in the line of its first course. It must be making for some station between that and Ipswich. Her mind, panoramic in its eagerness, had followed it out

on to the high road, and on and on, through villages, over heaths, and under rustling eaves of woodland, into the smoke-cloud of London itself, ere she perceived the vanity of such conjectures and the flame fell once more.

She tried to consider what to do, where to go; but her wits were uncontrollable; they would fly with the fugitives or come back only to adduce some impossible scheme of pursuit. Her head ached.

A sound of wheels roused her. A butcher's cart from Elmondham came rattling along, bumping callously in and out of ruts as deep as furrows. The boy driving it was a native of Ditchley. He had been of the number of her schoolday admirers. She stepped forward and he drew rein, seeing she wished to speak to him.

'Will you drive me to Elmondham station?'

'What, right thro' the town and past our shop? T'd be as much as my place is worth.'

'Then, if not to Elmondham, to Stenham Market. It's nearer, and the five-thirty stops there, I believe.'

'I fancy that dew. And 'tis a sight nigher, that's sarten sure. But I be wholly late as 'tis, and was I to go that way round, I should get in for it hot wi' the governor.'

He pushed his hat on one side and scratched his head, at the same time nibbling his whip, omitting no symbol of hesitation. He would love to take her, not a doubt of that. It would be like driving with a posy of rare sweet flowers that every one would admire and want to sniff at. But dare he? . . .

Lottie leaned forward in a yearning posture, uplifting her fresh young face with lips pouting a little: a declared temptation.

'Not for me, Jacky?'

'Dammy! . . . Gi' me yer hand! Jump up! That's he!'

'Drive for dear life if you love me!' she whispered, nestling close to him.

Away they went, bumping, jolting so that every plank in

the cart turned crazy, and it threatened every minute to overturn. Out on the main road it was smoother and their pace increased. Telegraph-posts fled by. The rare wayfarers grinned or jeered and thought them mad. If the speed gave signs of abatement, she had only to press a little against the driver and to a swish of the whip they plunged forward more furiously than ever.

It seemed but a very short while ere she saw the station, a diminutive group of buildings against some woods, at the end of a long stretch of road ash-grey in the shadow of the hedge. The sunset was at their backs, gilding them through a cloud of dust.

Above the clatter of their going came a thunderous, dull roar. A trail of smoke appeared through the trees, rosy with the evening light and flying, like the nebula of a comet, along a bank of purple woods. They could hear the clank and rattle of the train slowing up. It stopped with a sound like a groan, and the smoke sent up a straight column above the station roofs.

Lottie had her gloved hand on her companion's bare one, squeezing it hard. Their speed became sheer madness, the horse's buttocks leaping convulsively. Some people bellowed at them from the threshold of the Railway Inn. A group of coachmen at the booking-office door scattered cursing at their approach, each rushing to his horse's head to prevent a stampede.

'I'd do that again any day for love o' you,' whispered the boy as he handed her down. Though it was a warm evening the horse steamed like winter as it stood panting, with fallen head.

She did not seem to hear, but after a dazed stare scurried through the waiting-room on to the platform.

The train was gliding on.

At sight of its motion she lost her wits and dashed blindly at the door of a flying compartment; but strong arms caught her and dragged her back. A crowd closed in on her, scolding, gesticulating. The faces were stern

and peremptory, the voices harsh. Things animate and inanimate, all were against her; and she burst out sobbing shamelessly. Nothing mattered now. It was the end.

‘What’s up?’ asked a cheery bass voice. ‘Halloa! Girl crying! What’s the matter?’

Several voices proffered information, a confused murmur to her ears.

‘Missed the train? Very likely it was important she should catch it. Matter of life and death, perhaps; you can never tell. Any one here belonging to her?’

‘No, sir, that there be’ant.’

‘Well, here goes! . . . Can I help you in any way?’

Lottie, looking out of her pocket-handkerchief, saw an unusually jolly-looking gentleman lift his hat to her. He spoke authoritatively; the porters and loiterers acknowledged him a superior though he seemed a stranger to them. She could not help smiling through her tears at the big, round eyes of concern so incongruous with the ruddy, smooth-shaven face of jovial lines.

‘Oh no, thank you; at least I think not. I don’t quite know what to do, having missed the train. That’s all, thank you.’

‘Wait for the next!’ came the suggestion, so pat that it made the bystanders laugh; but the stranger’s frown stilled them.

‘’Twould be no use. The last was the one I wanted.’

‘Where do you live?’

‘I—I came from Ditchley . . .’

‘Why, that’s my way; I’ll drive you there. I shall have to take a fly in any case, and I’ll put you down where you like. . . . Just take my arm and we’ll step across to the inn and order our conveyance. I tell you what it is, you’re thoroughly fagged out. You must let me prescribe for you before we start.’

With scarcely a demur Lottie complied. The offer was so kindly, and withal so commandingly made, that her mind opposing no alternative, she was fain to accept it.

Besides, from the first glance she felt at ease with this gentleman. His face recalled others she had seen a good deal of in her own class of life; she knew at once that she could manage him. Somehow since the perversion of the butcher's boy, her maiden effort at seduction, she could rely without shame on her womanhood as a weapon.

On the arm of her champion she went out into the still evening. Birds were twittering their last, dogs barked afar off, all was exactly as usual. Crossing to the inn, she actually brushed against her late driver, who was standing dejectedly by his horse, which was useless, quite knocked up. He saw her and took a few steps after her eagerly.

'Do you know that fellow?' asked her protector, looking back.

'Oh no, no!' said Lottie vehemently, with an involuntary pressure of his arm. Her knight then dealt forth a scowl which effectually stopped the churl's advance.

'I say, you sir!' he called in corollary, 'you'd better keep that horse of yours on the move or there'll be something to pay.'

From a window of the inn-parlour Lottie saw the young butcher start homeward at a foot's pace, horse and man illustrating two kinds of wretchedness, and felt hardly any compunction at the sight.

The room where they waited was darkly furnished and hung with sporting prints of a bygone day, their paper discoloured as with rust. A smell of stale tobacco mingled with that of leather upholstery.

Lottie's companion called for brandy, making her swallow a dose, of which she soon began to feel the benefit.

The fly came and they got in, mine host bowing in attendance. It seemed strange to Lottie to be sitting with her face towards the horse and the gentleman opposite her. She was silent, wrestling to evolve some plan for her immediate guidance. The gentleman, however, chatted pretty continuously; and she liked to hear him, feeling sociable in spite of the day's crosses—a frame of mind for

which the brandy was, doubtless, in some measure accountable. She kept her hands instinctively close in her lap, apprehending that if one strayed he would pounce on it; and she looked chiefly out of the window, not caring to meet his eyes.

Trees flitting by on the hedgerows, in a grey haze no longer dead but beginning to throb with passion of the star-time, were fantastical in their dark contours, like mushrooms, fountains, feathers, fleurs-de-lys, phantasms of a grotesque dream wrought in one woof with the clear grey sky, themselves but of a swarter grey. Lights newly shining in far-off dwellings appeared as pinholes in a great grey tapestry. In a village through which they passed, one or two illumined cottages were jealous of their yellow glow, not suffering it to pass beyond the windows, seen distinct in every pane. Just there the gathering night, roused to conflict, was a positive azure, elsewhere a mere negation of light and colour.

The gentleman exclaimed: 'By the way, you haven't told me where to put you down? I only wish I could take you on with me, by Gad!'

She chose to disregard the interjection, replying: 'I should like him to stop at the Cow, if you please.'

'At what, did you say?'

'At Hilton Red Cow—a public-house.'

'Oh, I see. But that's not where you live!'

She knew that he had all the while been taking her for a lady born, and, not to dispel too roughly an illusion flattering her, she equivocated:

'It's near enough, thank you.'

'What, won't you tell me where you live and who you are? Come now, that's rather hard on a chap—precious rough, I call it! I should awfully like to see you again and continue our talk. This romantic acquaintance ought not to drop. Do tell me some place where I can hear of you! Upon my soul, I should be wretched if I really thought we should never meet again!'

Lottie said demurely: 'This is the Cow—the inn I spoke of. Will you tell him to stop, please?'

'I've a good mind to drive you on with me to Ditchley Abbey, you provoking little minx!' he laughed, as he let down the window to shout to their driver.

'To the Abbey! . . .'

'Yes—old Glover's place. My sister's sort o' housekeeper there, and I go and have a look at her occasionally, and bang at the old boy's game.'

He got out before her to offer the help of his hand.

'Oh then, I know who you are,' said Lottie, as with gathered skirt she stepped out into the road. 'Good-night, and thank you so much, my lord!'

'How the devil . . . ' began his lordship, but with a mocking courtesy she escaped out of earshot, seen in silhouette for a moment on the warm glow streaming from an open door.

Lord Elmsdale resumed his place in the fly, which moved on again. 'I wish to goodness I knew who you were, Miss Grey-eyes!' he murmured, apostrophising the padded corner she had left warm. 'Goes to a pub at night. Doesn't live there—can't live there; it's a sheer impossibility! . . . It's beastly mysterious, I call it. . . . Devil take me though, if she wasn't the nicest girl I ever set eyes on. Just my fancy: slim and springy and cheeky and all that!'

It needed his pleasant memory of her to support him through an uncomfortable evening; for the Abbey when he got there was upside down in commotion, and he and Kenneth Stoke had to shift pretty much for themselves.

CHAPTER IX

AT THE RED COW

THE brandy administered by Lord Elmsdale had restored to Lottie Heaviland something of that effrontery with which she had mesmerised the butcher-boy. Thoughts, plans, suggestions succeeded as flashes, lighting only the single point on which her mind chanced momentarily to be intent, blinding to every issue, every circumstance. Debarred from her home as well as from the Abbey by a hundred creeping shames, her thoughts were driven to focus on the inn where lay the box with her nightwear; and no sooner had the thought occurred than, regarding it as an inspiration, she had asked to be set down at the Red Cow.

She had no regular plan, only glimpses of a situation, a scene not destitute of excitement, wherein she hoped to bear herself so masterly as to shape events entirely to her will. She could not know the charm with which a demureness, so natural as to seem a part of her figure, invested impudence; yet she counted on it by intuition. It gave her piquancy, a bait as alluring to half mankind as the thistle to the ass.

Hesitation was a stranger to her frame of mind. The carriage had not begun to move on, ere she crossed the threshold of the Red Cow.

She was in a passage with soiled walls. From a door on the left, admitting to the taproom, whose lighted window she had seen from the road, came the notes of several voices talking and laughing gruffly. Going straight to the kitchen in the back-premises, where she looked to find

the woman who kept house for her kinsman, she was surprised on opening the door to discover darkness, without so much as a fire.

She turned back, thinking of the parlour—a place kept sacred as a church for the landlord's nap on Sundays, and daily as a receptacle for wayfarers of quality, should any such honour the house with their custom. But in act to close the kitchen door, she was surprised by mine host, who, hearing feet astray in the house, came out of his bar to look after the invader.

Deceived by her ladylike figure, and considerably mystified, he asked: 'What is it, Miss?'

For answer, to his great abashment, she clung to him and kissed him.

'God bless my eyes and nose! . . . Wa, if ta be'ant Lottie, poor Billum's gel, I'm a cinder! They did say a while back as how yow was gone to sarvice up yonder at t' Abbey. . . . Well, to-be-sure!'

'Didn't you get my boxes?' she asked, still hanging on him.

'Oh, ah!—and that's the trewth. I had 'em took out to one o' the shods where they lay kivered up out o' the way. . . Well, yow ha' growed good tidily since I last set eyes on ye. A right jolly mawther, and ripe for courtin'! . . . I heerd ye go to the kitchen whereby that all be dark. The old dear what ha' kep' house for me tew year come next Candlemas-time, cleared out yester-mornun in a huff. They all dew ut suner or later; I ha' tried a many since my poor dear wife took and died. 'Twixt yow and me, my dear, 'tis o' cause I 'ont marry none on 'em, nor yet 'cline to their will nor walk in their ways, which is matrimony as Scripter puts it. . . . Comin'!'

Frenetic rappings of a pewter pot on a table or bench recalled him to the bar, whither he went slowly, quaking and purple with the jest-throes. Lottie was glad of the minute's grace. Her relative's unwonted fluency, as much as his aroma, hinted that he was somewhat gone in liquor.

He had in fact been soaking all day long to celebrate his release from feminine shackles.

Returning, he ushered her into the parlour, still chuckling over the joke which she had heard him retailing to his cronies; and producing matches from a crease of his fustian coat, lighted one of two candles that rose among outlandish shells and china images upon the chimney-piece. The room had the must inseparable from such household museums, where the mummies of ancestral respectability are preserved on knitted mats under glass cases, and venerated as relics.

George Adolphus Heaviland, whose second name was as much a dead letter as the article 'and snuff' concluding the list over the inn-door of things he was licensed to sell, was a burly old man with three-fold chin like a cornice supporting his broad face. He had handsome features and good eyes under well-marked brows. His hair clustered in tight curls low on his crimson neck like unbleached wool. In toga and chaplet, he might have sat for a bust of one of the later Caesars, a resemblance which his publican's dignity strikingly asserted.

Gentlefolks who conversed with him went away with the idea that he was half an idiot; the truth being simply that the scope or province of his mind so justly coincided with his material outlook, that a bookish word or metaphor could quite gravel him. His brain, if slow in its lucubrations, was wholly sure, as he was wont to boast; and by the men of his own class he was revered as something of an oracle, his words, even when drunk, having the weight and value of things rare.

As he turned from lighting the candle, which he did with deliberation and great care as to where he threw the match, Lottie opened fire upon him. The whole battery of her charms blazed forth simultaneously, illumining her face and imparting a subtle and seductive fascination to the very tips of her fingers as she raised them to unpin her hat.

'Uncle,'--He was not in the least her uncle, but so she

had always styled him—‘Uncle, I’m going to stay. I can’t let you be alone like this—neglected—without your comforts!’

The old man rubbed his curly white pate with a grin, part amusement, part perplexity.

He was not the fool Lottie thought him, nor were his wits so fuddled as she imagined. It would have taken well nigh as much strong drink to incapacitate George Adolphus Heaviland as it takes water to drown a fish. Stimulants would irrigate but seldom flood his brain. The silence she took for a trance of stupidity was mere abstraction in the effort to see through her game. A solid, unuttered contempt for womankind had, by inclining him to observe their habits as he had studied the ways of oxen, sheep and pigs, led him constantly to score in his dealings with the sex. He was partial to females, had indeed in youth won the envied reputation of a village Lovelace; but had never since his boyhood been fooled by one of them.

‘That be wunnerful kind on ye, my dear; but I don’t fare’s though I could accept of it. What’d yer father and mother be sayin’ was yow to bide here the whole night? They’d be main vexed, I reckon; and hew’d they blame but me for keepin’ on ye?’

‘I’m sure they wouldn’t wish me to leave you like this. Why, there isn’t even a fire in the kitchen! I’ll make one this minute and get ready a tidy supper—whatever you like!’

Her hat was on the table by this time, and her fair hair, a little disordered, trespassed on cheeks pink with excitement. It was now the turn of her jacket.

The old boy watched her unfolding with a relish he could not disguise; but for all that he was not beguiled, for he still kept wondering what on earth she would be at. Collating the evidence of the boxes with her transparent eagerness to spend the night at the Red Cow, he guessed she had been turned away from the Abbey for some misconduct, and was ashamed to face her parents. Amused

with her dead set at him, and withal a little flattered by her choice of him for protector, he felt disposed to humour her. Mention of supper, too, conjured up the vision of sundry little comfortable accessories his evening would lack were he to send her away.

At length he said :

‘ Well, my dear—since yow be so kind, and sarten sure the folks at home ’ont be worritin’—there’s a bed on the back-chamber yow can make for yerself; I’ll show ye where ta sheets and blankets lay. . . . I’m not gainsaying but what that’ll dew me good to ha’ a warm bit o’ supper. I fare as though I’d ha’ cotched cold somehow. And if yow’ll bile some drinkin’-water, I’ll take a glass o’ hot grog wi’t against t’ inflammation. Here be matches. Yow’ll find a lamp on the dresser, and there’s kindlin’ and a handful o’ coal in a box agen the range. (Comin’! dew yow hear together? makin’ sich a din to bring ta house down!)’

Having seen his accepted niece enter the kitchen, he passed again into the taproom where the party waxed uproarious in protest against his long neglect. There were four men, three of them labourers from some scattered cottages in the vicinity, one a wagoner who had looked in early in the afternoon and completely forgotten his journey, even his whereabouts. This being sat alone near the door, his back against the wainscot, beaming on life through a blissful mist of beer. His rosy face, framed in sandy whiskers, disposed like the rays in a conventional sun, shone with a kind of glaze as if some one had spent time on polishing it. Occasionally words of wisdom fell from his lips like pearls from those of the damsel in the fairy-tale, and with as little relevance. A flower fixed in one corner of his mouth typified speech when he was silent, and shook a little if he spoke. Once or twice in drinking from the pewter pot which stood on the table before him, its shiftings marked by as many intersecting ring-stains, he had dropped the blossom and begun blubbering like a

child for its bauble, disconsolate till some one restored it to him, when he smiled again.

At sunset George Adolphus had tried to put a little sense into him with chaff, prods in the ribs and slaps on the back ; but in vain. He would budge for nothing short of downright violence. So, having a farmer's care for beasts, old George had taken the horses out of the wagon and stabled them, the wain itself standing with dropped shafts in the yard, in abeyance, while the jehu drank and dreamed.

The three remaining customers sat together on a high-backed settle by the fire-place. A newspaper they had long ceased spelling was spread on the nearest table. They smoked short clay pipes filled with shag. Every now and then a laugh was flung across at the entranced one, who vouchsafed no response beyond a wider smile which did not, however, reach the vague blue eyes fixed visionary on a point beyond all horizons.

'Georgy-porgy, pudden and pie!' sang out a jaunty individual with hat over one ear, as the landlord rejoined them.

'Kiss ta gels and make 'em cry!' supplied another, pleased to show his scholarship. 'That be about ta way on 't, I reckon. Did she wholly cry, bo', or were that just make-believe?'

A loud guffaw followed these sallies. When it had subsided, George Heaviland, quite unmoved, observed :

''Tis a niece o' mine come to get my supper.'

'Go yow along, bo'!' cried the sprightly one, affecting incredulity. 'We ha' heerd that there tale different times. Your niece, eh? Come now, but that's a good un! I suppose they was all on 'em your nieces—all the whole lot on 'em—yow know what I mean!'

'Yow allust was a master-fule, Arny,' said mine host so positively as to turn the laugh against the joker. 'God love ye, I knowed yer dear mother and she were just the same, soft i' the head! . . . How dim that old lamp dew barn! . . . And 'tis time ta blind were down. I suppose

that wouldn't be no use axin' our governor there to lend a hand, though a dew set right agen it?'

This allusion to the silent guest raised a little storm of gibes at that eclectic toper, without however displacing or penetrating the fog of rapture in which he sat.

'Boil me if it ain't the rummest job I ever did see!' cried the jaunty man. 'Wake up, old dear! Ahoy, bo'! Yer lamp's out and yow be in the ditch! God love ye, he don't hear a ward. . . . Is it known hew a be?'

'Never seed un afore,' said Heaviland, as he drew down the blind. 'His wain come from Barnham Magna, right t'other end o' the county. He marn ha' been baitin' pretty frequent as he rode along. He don't mind us, bless ye; he's a king, that's what he be!'

As if under a spell, the object of all eyes began speaking as one talks in his sleep:

'Ah, there be ta king—what some calls a sovereign—and then agen there be ta sekky-tairy. In every country, mind yow, furrin's well as here. I'm sayin' nawthun agen government. That fare wunnerful nice for such as like it. But gie me a king—a queen it is hereaway, I'm not denyin'—that's my sentiments. I be blew, trew blew—Ha, ha! I wer born blew and I hope to die blew. . . . Then there's ta sekky-tairy. Rich folks go straight to the king, but poor folks marn 'ply to the sekky-tairy. That's ta warld, that be, and a good warld tew, say I . . . He, he!'

'Well, o' all the rum old dears!' cried the sprightly one, slapping his cords.

'Whist! I can hear some'at,' said George Heaviland, lifting his hand. 'Sound mortal like a gen'l'm'n's carriage tew!'

The noise of wheels drawing up to the inn door was heard through the voice of the drunkard, still descanting:

'Yow can't dew nawthun 'thout a sekky-tairy. What'd this here bootiful buildin' be, where'd all the mighty great housen up in Lunnon be, s'pose there weren't no sekky-tairy to look arter 'em . . .' His voice grew inarticulate, then died.

The grind of wheels ceased without, there was a clink of harness, the thud of a driver springing down, and then heavy footsteps in the passage. The taproom door burst open ere mine host could reach it, and a man in the shabby half-livery of a jobbing coachman crossed the threshold with a cry of 'Good-evenin', gents all!'

'Evenin', Harbert,' said old George casually.

'What news, mate?' cried the jaunty man, with a cordial nod.

'Ah, news you may well say! Tarr'ble news!—Uncommon! I'll tell ye in a minute, but my throat's that parched I fare right hoarse. Gin and bitter, that's my tippie, if yow'll oblige, governor!'

He sat down on a settle by himself, facing the drunken dreamer, from whom he was parted by the width of the room.

'Yow be a-lookin' at our pardner yonder,' said the jovial man, with a nod at his unconscious butt.

'Well, an ha'n't I the right? He be a-starin' me threw and threw.'

'That's o' cause yow set yerself right opposite tew un, else he'd never ha' looked at ye. He's a happy man, he be!'

'Far gone—eh?' inquired the coachman, with raised eyebrows and pursed lips.

'Wholly blind.'

'Well I never!'

George Heaviland returned with the liquor desired of the latest comer, and every one settled down in expectation of the promised news. Before satisfying their curiosity, the flyman took a pull at the mug before him, and setting it down again, wiped his lips on his coat-sleeve.

'I ha' just come from Ditchley Abbey, where I druv a gentleman—and a lady tew, part o' the way, which axed to be set down at the Cow. Seed anythin' of her, governor?'

'Come fro' where, did you say?'

'Fro' the Railway Inn, Stenham, yow know where I wark.'

‘Yes, she was for here all right. ’Tis my niece yow mean.’
There was a general laugh.

‘A mortal nice gel she be and no mistake, by what I see of her, and the gen’l’m’n he fared wholly sweet on her. Axed me hew she was, but I couldn’t tell un. . . . Well, as I was a-sayin’, I druv up to Ditchley Abbey, and there were the whole house inside out as ye may say, account o’ one o’ the young ladies, her they call Miss Edy, cuttin’ off with a groom, so ’tis said, for one o’ the stablemen be missin’. And ta young lady ha’ took her maid along of her, a young ’oman from Ditchley street, name o’ Charlotte. And there be search-parties and telegraphin’, and the Lord knows what all, besides free drinks in the sarvants’ hall; and they dew say as the old gentleman ’d give a million pound to him as’ll tell where his daughter be, he fare that un-sensed, poor old dear! Now yow know together. If any one here want to arn a million pound he know what to find out and where to ’ply.’

The flyman emptied his can and went out, followed by the landlord, who found time to put a question or two ere he drove off.

George Adolphus was pensive on his return to the tap-room. He had in truth much to ruminate. The coachman’s tidings worked in his mind with an action like that of yeast on dough. There were points hard to assimilate, such as Lottie’s coming from Stenham Market, the gentleman with her, her desertion of her mistress and her choice of a refuge so near home. But he saw clearly that her affected tenderness for himself was so much play-acting, and rejoiced to be in possession of a secret which gave him the whip-hand.

At length came a light rap on the door, and Lottie’s voice:

‘Your supper’s ready, uncle!’

‘Comin’!’ he promptly replied, and stepped to the kitchen.

The spread testified to her housewifely qualities. There was half a ham, four sausages, a plate of toasted cheese, and

beside his tumbler a jug which steamed, showing she had not forgotten his word concerning grog; the whole laid out in a style that would have done no discredit to a gentleman's table. But he was not destined to peaceful enjoyment of the meal; for scarcely had he taken knife and fork ere a clatter of hoofs and a man's voice bawling 'House ahoy!' compelled him to get up and see what was toward.

Lottie turned pale, sure of a hue-and-cry in pursuit of her. The old man noted her pallor with an inward chuckle. But the next minute brought her reprieve.

'Hew be yow, I should like to know, to scare honest folks wi' such-a-like hollerin'?' cried George Heaviland wrathfully from the doorstep. He could discern the outlines of a man on horseback confronting him, in the earth-gloom, dense and black to the height of the trees, though the upper sky was almost blue and alive with stars.

'Sarvice, governor! No offence, I hope, as none intended. I'm fro' Mr. Waldy's malt-office down at Elmondham and please, ha' yow seen a feller with a wain fro' Barnham Magna. We expected un farsty mornun. A marn be wholly lost for I ha' 'quired at every pub along the road.'

'Then yow come to the right shop at last. Your man ha' been a-settin' in my bar since three o'clock-time, and for all he ha'n't took a great sight he be heavenly tight as yow may see for yerself. Ta wain's up ta yard, and ta hosses in my stable. Yow'd best take the chap along o' yow. I don't want un here all night.'

Much time was consumed in reharnessing the team by the light of a lantern, and getting the wagon under way. Lastly, when all was ready, the messenger and George Heaviland, assisted by the three gossips with advice and banter, supported the dreamer out into the road. As they laid hold of him he began to speak of butchers, as usual in a large style of generalisation. The effect of the open air on his intoxication was similar to that it has on an unswathed mummy. All his beauty, all the grandeur of his countenance fell like a house of cards. A speechless drunkard, a

loathly, inert mass of human degradation, was heaved into the wain, where it lay as it fell, emitting a faint moan from time to time. The horse which had brought the messenger was attached to the back of the wagon, and the whole dark structure moved slowly off in the blackness under the stars.

‘Well, o’ all t’ unaccountable nights I ever did know,’ said her kinsman, rejoining Lottie in the kitchen, ‘this here fare out-and-out t’ uncommonest!’

She had had the forethought to keep the sausages and toasted cheese warm at the fire during his absence, an attention he repaid with a smile and great sociability. After closing-time, they sat down together again till he noticed her yawning cavernously behind a hand of astonishing whiteness. The old man watched her furtively, admiring her dainty appearance and her gown’s neat fit, finding it hard to bear in mind that she was a labourer’s daughter of his own kindred. She thought she had enslaved him; but George Adolphus, though dull as ditchwater to the eye, was deep, and a match for a young girl, he flattered himself.

At length she asked leave to go to bed. For the last half-hour she had been nodding to sleep and starting awake by turns. He had seen, but had taken no notice, treating her unwillingness to declare her need of rest as part of the craft of which he meant to cure her, in so far as he himself was its object.

No sooner was she between sheets than Lottie fell sound asleep, and only awoke to sunshine falling on the bed.

A high wind had sprung up in the night, an east wind, which had swept the earth and nether sky clean of mist, as it had been the floor and walls of a mighty hall now filled from end to end with clear light and the rush of air. A sound which puzzled her at first, but which she presently knew for the creaking of the signboard on the bough of the sycamore, told her whereabouts. Full consciousness brought a wretched, sinking sense of utter failure, the reverse of yesterday’s adventurous mood. She rose, washed and dressed herself in a dejection too profound, too all-envelop-

ing for tears. Where was Enid now? What had befallen her?

The publican knocked at her door, saying with an audible chuckle: 'Yow be a nice house-kipper, to be sure!—Ten o'clock gone, and yow not out o' your room. I be to keep house for yow seemly. . . . Shall I put ta kettle on for yer breakfast? How sune 'll yow be down?'

At that she made great haste, giving the final touches to her hair and dress as she went downstairs.

At the end of the entrance passage, against the light, she saw the stalwart form of her kinsman in the frame of the doorway, talking to some one invisible. Unthinking, she ran to him, anxious to apologise for her lateness.

'Why, here she is herself! How could you tell me that lie?' cried the voice of Mrs. Garland. 'Charlotte, put on your hat at once and come with me!'

At a little distance a brougham was waiting in the road.

As Lottie, all quivering with the shock, hung a moment irresolute, she heard the old man grumble:

'A lie, mum! I never telled yer leddyship no lie. Yow'll mind I said: "I ha'n't set eyes on her this blessed mornun." Them was the wards. And Gawspel trew they was, my lady. 'Tis wholly wunnerful how she dew sleep. She be just this minute out o' bed as yow may see by her looks.'

The dame from the Abbey beat with her foot on the ground. 'I'm not going to argue with you,' she said, chin in air. 'Make haste, Charlotte. Mr. Glover wishes to see you at once. Don't keep me waiting here all the morning.'

'Ont ye set down inside while she's a-tidyin' of herself, mum?' said old Heaviland, presenting his dwelling with a courtly bow.

Something like a smile shone through the great lady's displeasure without dissipating it, as she replied, 'I had rather not, thank you,' and walked off towards the carriage.

'Whatever for did yow come runnin' out like that to baffle me?' said the innkeeper, following Lottie. 'Another tick and, like enow, I'd ha' made her believe yow worn't

here. Now, I ax ye, what were ta good o' yow 'temptin' to diddle me and hide ta trewth. If I hadn't ha' found out for myself last night, I'd ha' let the lady in unsuspectin', and now it's yer own fault as yow be nabbed. . . . A wunnerful fine lady, and pleasant-spoken for all I riled her. . . . Now, don't ye think yow might as well ha' telled me at ta farst?'

Lottie was too numb to speak. She turned and gave him a dispassionate kiss ere she scaled the stairs.

While she pinned on her hat, looking in the glass by instinct, the wind in the orchard was an intolerable noise, the distant creak of the signboard jarred on her nerves. She would have silenced all nature, slain every living thing, herself included.

CHAPTER X

AT DITCHLEY ABBEY

RALPH FARLOW THANESON, fifth Viscount Elmsdale, lolled after breakfast in a deep wicker chair in the conservatory, throwing off piecemeal the morning's burden of letters. His legs crossed on high made a lectern; his countenance flickered from frown to smile as he read. There were bills and begging appeals, one invitation, and a mauve envelope stamped with a white monogram, containing two sheets of the same hue, perfumed and covered in a woman's sprawling hand, every other word being misspelt. After perusing this last, his lordship laughed without much zest and indulged in a loud yawn, with hands clasped behind his neck and a mighty stretch of his whole body.

Then he turned from the bank of flowers, which rose on steps before him and seemed intent on his doings as eyes of spectators in a theatre, to stare through the glass wall at the breezy gardens, crisped in stark outline under a sky of living, piercing blue.

The song of a high wind on a sunny day is inspiriting or the reverse according to the humour of the subject. To Lord Elmsdale, that September morning, all was vanity—a vain brilliance, a vain burden—excepting the pipe between his teeth and some thoughts which kept recurring of the damsel he had shepherded the evening before.

He had fallen in a languor of not very sanguine reverie when his sister came to join him. It was the only hour of the twenty-four when she could count on a private chat with him.

The look of slight weariness, which usually gave to her features a haughty cast of distinction, was to-day so deepened that she appeared downright haggard. He remarked on her wretched demeanour with a brother's candour.

'Upon my soul, Hermia, you look fifty! You shouldn't worry so. After all, the girl isn't your daughter. Nice girl too; I liked her; not the sort you'd expect to bolt with a groom.' His sister blenched, but he was not observing her. 'But it's not your fault any way. They make you slave hard enough, though it is for a big screw; you're not in debt to old Glover. Worry'll only age you without helping anybody. . . . I suppose the shoot's off?'

With hands strained and knotted at her lap, she replied, not heeding his reference to the day's sport:

'How can I help worrying! You seem to forget my own story. It is so like. . . . And I am very fond of Enid; I often used to think we were similar, or at all events that she was very like what I was then. And now this elopement—so exactly the same it makes me shudder, as if there were a wheel of wretchedness for ever turning, and I, seeing its victims, powerless to stop it. That was my nightmare all last night; I couldn't sleep for it.'

'You're fagged out, that's what's the matter. . . . But I say, don't go thinking that what I said just now had anything to do with that beast Garland and you. I'm not such a cad as to mean that, though I do say devilish awkward things without thinking. That's all done with and buried long ago. The man's dead, I showed you last time I was down. There can be no doubt. We'd got him shipped to South Africa after he'd made your life a terror for years by turning up and blackmailing you, and the steamer went down off St. Helena, all lives lost and his name in the list. That's clear enough. I don't know what more you can want. . . . At any rate you're free now to marry again, or do what you like; so cheer up, old girl! Did you ever think of annexing old Glover?—Come, out with it, Hermia!—It has entered your head?'

‘Perhaps—and gone out again as quickly. Truly, Ralph, I have always rather disliked him. I never felt the slightest sympathy with him till last night, when I came on him unawares. Getting no answer to my knock, I opened his study-door. He was there with his head on the table, reproaching himself—oh, so bitterly—for what has happened. I heard him moan “Her child, her living image!” and there before him lay a miniature he had been looking at; it must have been the portrait of his wife. I went out again quietly, and I don’t think he heard me at all.’

‘Poor old boy!’ murmured Lord Elmsdale, whose heart was very large and soft. ‘But it’s a good thing he takes it like that. He’ll be kind to her if she comes back—as you did, Hermia.’

Mrs. Garland winced.

‘Or he’ll turn round and revile her, as my father did, Elmsdale,’ she retorted bitterly. ‘If it had not been for your championship, though you were but a schoolboy, and Aunt Edith’s kindness, I should have lost all self-respect and gone right under, drowned myself or gone back to that man. I have just one consolation in thinking of Enid: she has taken her maid with her, which may be a safeguard. I do pray it may come right somehow. Now please let us change the subject.’

She brushed a lace handkerchief across her eyes. ‘I came here for a little recreation.’ Her smile was pitiful. ‘And behold, you have made me cry. . . . How the wind groans! Tell me something about yourself; I’ve hardly had a word with you!’

With a shrug and a laugh, he replied:

‘Nothing to tell. Such as I am, I’m here. You can see for yourself.’

‘The same bad boy? . . . Really, Elmsdale, it is time you mended your ways and thought of settling down for the sake of the name. I had thought of Enid for you.’

She sighed, fingering the leaves of a camellia which grew in a tub beside her.

‘Not my style!—Much too high-falutin’!’ said his lordship, with a wellnigh pious fervour. ‘I can’t take to a blue-stocking even at the filly stage, any more than I can to your society-women. Can’t do it; it isn’t in me. . . . I say, though, I met a ripping girl at the station yesterday and gave her a lift in my cab as she was coming this way. She talked like a lady; perhaps you can tell me who she is. She asked to be set down at a pub called the Red Cow, which the flyman told me is kept by a man named Heaviland, a widower without children. That can’t be where she lives. Must be near, though. . . .’

‘Heaviland!’ Mrs. Garland left fingering the shrub to lean across to her brother and lay a firm hand on his arm. ‘Ralph, tell me what the girl was like!’

Mistaking her eagerness for interest propitious to his budding sentiment, my lord launched forth in racy panegyric.

‘It’s the maid—Enid’s maid!’ Mrs. Garland rose in agitation. ‘Heaven help her. She is alone after all with the man. I must see Mr. Glover at once. Charlotte must be found and questioned. I cannot stay. . . . Poor boy!’ She bent over and patted her brother’s cheek, he suffering the endearment with a grin. ‘I’m afraid it’s dull for you. Captain Stoke is in the smoking-room; why don’t you and he take your guns and stroll round? You can quite see why it is Mr. Glover has put off the big shoot that was to have been to-day. He’s most anxious you should stay on. . . . Good-bye!’

‘Well, I’m dashed!’ said Lord Elmsdale, as he watched her retreating figure, ‘Enid’s maid, is it? The devil it is!’ Collecting his letters, he rose with a yawn. ‘Well I’ll go and look for Stoke.’

His hair roughened by the wind, he walked round outside the house to the smoking-room window which, being on the sheltered side, stood open, and thrust in his head.

Captain Stoke was reclining in a leathern arm-chair that flanked the empty fireplace. Ruth, who had been bending close over him, sprang erect at the voice of the noble marplot exclaiming:

‘I say, old chap; what do you say to a stroll with the guns?’

Answer came on a yawn:

‘A bit windy, isn’t it? . . . What’s wrong with the season? It’s the sort of day you’d expect about the end of next month. . . . All right, if you’re keen on it!’

Ruth, showing some umbrage, was as a sop invited to accompany them, and flew off to don proper clothes. Mere walking was a pastime she abhorred, but the society of two smart men and the pretext of their sport gave to the present sortie a slight but delicious spice of naughtiness.

But Fate sided with the birds that morning; for, just as Lord Elmsdale, having been to fetch his gun, was crossing the pavement of the entrance-hall, a carriage drew up to the steps without, and the glass-panelled doors were flung open for the passage of Mrs. Garland, whom he saw alight, steering a crestfallen girl. At this juncture Mr. Glover thrust a face of perturbation out of his study door and, discerning his noble guest, besought him to enter and support him in the examination.

Seated beside his host, the gun across his knees, my lord made great eyes at Lottie as she entered, pushed on by Mrs. Garland. But the maid failed to perceive him. She looked dazed rather than abashed, though her eyes were down-cast.

Crimson with battling emotions, Simon Glover stood up, mouthed angrily, but could find no words to address her. He brushed a hand across his forehead.

‘Lord Elmsdale, I am too upset; may I trouble you to question this young woman about my daughter?’

He sat down again and, chin in hand, observed only his spokesman, giving his profile to the women.

Lord Elmsdale advanced his chair with alacrity, privately tickled at seeing his sister bite her lip and shake shoulders at his promotion. Workmanlike in all he undertook, he began by judicial clearing of the throat.

‘Ahem!—Now please tell me the whole story from start

to finish. How did your mistress first come to take notice of this man she 's gone off' with ?'

Very kind was his tone. As one awaking out of sleep Lottie stared at him, first in bewilderment, then with dismayed recognition.

Her eyes drooped again, and her cheeks were very rosy as she replied :—

'He used to meet her last autumn-time when we were out walking.'

'Miles ?' threw in Mrs. Garland, flatly incredulous.

'Indeed no, ma'am ! Miss Enid would soon have settled the likes of him !' Lottie straightened, through pride for her mistress. 'I was speaking, ma'am, of Mr. Sidney Boyne—the gentleman Miss Enid has eloped with. And I will say, in spite of all, that she was driven to it. It wasn't her wish, she hadn't a thought of it till that night of the ball, she came up to her room in a dreadful way, her face all swelled with crying. I couldn't bear to see my dear take on so, and I think shame o' those who made her life a misery two whole days and nights.'

She had raised her voice to compete with the hubbub of discussion that had all at once arisen in the room ere, becoming aware that she was no longer interesting, she broke off. Her object was not to vindicate herself but to whiten Enid. Listlessly abiding their further pleasure, she stood gazing out of the window with hands clasped at her lap, aware of Lord Elmsdale's furtive watch on her, but lifted beyond self-consciousness by the tragedy of her position.

Meanwhile, all sternness, all tension, was gone from the group of her judges who were talking earnestly among themselves in a thankful strain. Relief was depicted in lines of joy on old Simon's face.

'Sidney Boyne !—why, that 's the young fellow Sir Charles was telling me about—his cousin, I think !'

'A gentleman, at any rate,' put in Lord Elmsdale, still with an eye to Lottie. He now sat astride of a chair, his gun leaned against the writing-table.

‘How thankful I am!’ gasped Mrs. Garland, hand to side.

‘He’s poor, I believe’—Mr. Glover went on, not without a certain relish of the rascal’s poverty—‘but I’m so relieved, I hardly mind. It’s the girl’s choice at any rate; the bed’s of her own making, and she couldn’t grumble if I cut her off with a shilling. But I’ll be lenient with ’em. Perhaps I’ll forgive ’em, if I like the chap and she’s properly ashamed of herself.’

He rubbed hands a little.

‘Well, shall I go on with the questions, or is that all you want to know?’ asked Lord Elmsdale, loth to keep an attractive damsel so long standing.

Mr. Glover betrayed the utmost indifference; while Mrs. Garland, desiring certain elucidations, spoke direct to the maid, rather pointedly excluding her brother. Questioning to the point, she speedily learned the true part of Miles in the drama of elopement, the cause of Charlotte’s apparent desertion of her mistress, and some particulars of Enid’s commerce with Mr. Boyne.

Enough having been elicited, Lottie was told she might go, and the conclave broke up, only Simon Glover remaining to pace the study with the feelings of a man reprieved from execution. Instead of dismal moans, silver trumpets sounded in the roar of the wind, the woods were an army with banners, and the brightness of the day seemed not purposeless as before.

Out in the hall Lottie stopped, not knowing whether to pass out by the front or the back. Long use prompted a turn towards the servants’ quarters, but then she no longer made one of the household and the front door was nearer. The sight of waving trees through its upper panels of glass brought no refreshment, no thought of release, for she had nowhere to go. Home held shame; her kinsman’s house, after being so ignominiously arrested there, held shame too; turn where she would a sword of shame leapt at her heart unerringly. Her feet dragged, her eyes were half-shut in utter weariness.

Some one touched her shoulder when, looking up, she beheld Mrs. Garland, and the lady's face wore an expression she had never before seen there.

'Run and take off your things, Charlotte. Then, if you come to my bedroom, I will find you work to do.'

Lottie stared a moment in breathless doubt at the speaker; then something like fear came on her, and without a word she fled choking to her old room.

'I tell you what, Hermia: you're a brick!' said Lord Elmsdale, patting his sister on the back. She looked round with a smile, unaware of his nearness till he spoke.

'What else could I do, Ralph? You see for yourself how wretched the child is. When one is desperate like that, a word turns the scale for good or ill. Now you're not to meddle with her in this house. I must have your word.'

'All right,' muttered his lordship rather sulkily.

Ruth Glover and Captain Stoke had been on the lawn nearly an hour waiting for him, the former battling with gusts which flapped her skirts and threatened to wrest the feather from her hat, the latter shifting his gun periodically from arm to arm. When the laggard at last turned up it was too late to think of starting; but the tidings he brought were of so cheering a nature that they forbore to chide him. Ruth especially was overjoyed to learn that her sister's lover was at least a gentleman. The excursion was put off to the afternoon, the guns, unloaded, were left in the smoking-room, and the three in joyous mood dispersed to wash hands for luncheon.

About three o'clock they finally set out, attended by two gamekeepers in velveteen suits and tan buskins, with dogs at their heels, and a tatterdemalion squad of beaters mustered in haste. Two hours and more were spent with profit on the upland behind Ditchley church, the guns popping frequently. Ruth, exhorted by her lover, kept close at his side, entranced at first by the novelty of her position which soon, however, lost colour and began to pall. The hoarse shouts of the horde of skirmishers belaying every

slight cover with their sticks became tiresome after a while ; and one of the ragamuffins unadvisedly crossing Lord Elmsdale's line of fire, that nobleman indulged in strong language, quite forgetful of her presence.

'Steady on, Elmsdale !' called Stoke, in whom there was an element of almost ladylike precision one often notices in men schooled at Eton, and who was for the moment seriously annoyed on Miss Glover's account.

His lordship looked round, reddened a little and laughed—actually laughed as he bawled out : 'Sorry !'

The beaters had the eccentricity to see blood on everything and announce the fact. Ruth only wanted to know when they were going home.

Birds were plentiful, and sport was favoured by an abatement of wind since the morning. Though a stiff breeze yet, it had lost all spitefulness of the gale and was now clement, giving a buffet of encouragement like a sovereign's accolade. Trees swayed gently on every wave of the park-like prospect, with its nestling homesteads, and distant windmills making on the clear blue horizon a stir wistful as the beat of white wings on a halcyon sea.

Not until half-past five was the crew of beaters disbanded and paid off. Miss Glover walked between the two guns, the object of attentions and apologies which, though belated, eventually thawed the ice of reserve in which she had thought fit to case her displeasure. The country was like a mould of bronze, the wind had almost dropped, the immense dome of sky was cloudless and clear in every part, save at a point westward where the sun, drooping behind a fringe of woods, raised a cloud of amber dust in which trees looked like shadows. In the same quarter the sails of Ditchley mill made a slow flutter as of an insect part benumbed. The beams played full on their faces, irking sight.

Coming out by a stile on to the road which skirted the park fence they found pleasure in the glistening shade of great trees. Overhead the hood of leaves purled like a

brook, birds innumerable twittered and trilled. Lord Elmsdale was waxing sentimental, beginning to envy the lovers their happy plight and bemoan his own lorn condition, when a carriage and pair overtook them in which sat Mrs. Garland and the squire of Ditchley. They had been at Hilton calling on Sir Charles Vellum, and Mr. Glover was in rare good-humour.

‘I’ve heard all about this fellow Boyne,’ he told Lord Elmsdale in a whisper, leaning out of the carriage which had stopped to pick up Ruth at her eager request. ‘His father was a barrister, his mother of a first-class family and a cousin of the Vellums. Sir Charles says he thinks more highly of the chap now than ever he did in his life before. He would never have thought it in him to make off with a fortune. That all depends, you see, and so I told him. I’m not a hard man but I expect my due. The young monkey may find he’s reckoned without his host, and so I told Sir Charles—— eh? Ha, ha!’

‘That’s good!’ ejaculated Lord Elmsdale, seeing there was a joke but not very clear as to where it lay.

The carriage moved on, soon distancing the two sportsmen. Mrs. Garland ventured to reprove Ruth for her forwardness in intruding on the men’s special pastime. But the daughter of the house, already exasperated at being expected to sit with her back to the horses while a hireling filled the seat of honour at her father’s side, only laughed rather offensively. With a shrug of the shoulders she said, looking over the chaperon’s hat:

‘I fail to see anything improper: Lord Elmsdale was with us.’

To hear her brother thus loftily quoted for propriety was too much for Mrs. Garland’s countenance. She laughed out very merrily, thereby infuriating Ruth who had thought to crush her. The younger lady was racking her brains for something to say that should be at once cutting and unanswerable, when Mr. Glover balked her malice by engaging in talk with Mrs. Garland to the exclusion of his

daughter, who bit her lip, feeling mortified as a child put down.

All that evening old Simon's good-humour was a fire to warm the company, which had experienced the chill his gloom diffused through the house. It was evident also at breakfast next morning, though a shadow crossed his face when, looking through his letters, he found no word from Enid. Mrs. Garland, however, assured him that she could hardly, anyhow, have written so soon, and the assurance was chorused in cheery tones by the two visitors.

As on the preceding day, Lord Elmsdale withdrew to the conservatory and his sister joined him there.

'No beastly wind this morning,' he said thankfully, stretching himself and pitching aside his letters as she approached.

'I wish this sort of weather might last,' she replied, evidently temporising, for her hands played nervously together and she shunned her brother's gaze, as was her manner when she had something delicate to impart. He began to fear a scolding, conscious of having ogled Lottie once on the stairs and again in a passage, the two occasions of his meeting her since the trial.

'Elmsdale'—she was toying with a bit of ribbon, crumpling and smoothing it by turns—'you know what we were talking about this time yesterday?'

'That pretty girl you behaved so decently to?'

'No; Mr. Glover—— You asked me a question then, and I answered in the negative.'

'Oh, ah!' cried his lordship, catching her drift. He sat up, interested. 'Well?'

'Well, I had not thought of it but it seems he has. He hinted as much in the course of our drive yesterday.'

'And you accepted him? Bravo! Best thing you could do!'

'He did not quite propose, and I am not sure I should have said yes if he had. But he let me see the way the wind blows.'

'It'll be just the thing for you, Hermia! You were made

to boss a big show and have money to chuck about. Only you wouldn't chuck it about, catch you, you're too 'cute. Now I should; and I should curse all the ceremony and servants and bunkum. I wouldn't live in state at my own place even if I could afford it. The stickiness 'd get on my liver. I shall go on letting the house to my dying day. Give me a little place, a pretty girl, a horse or two, and plenty of beer and bacey, and there I'm a king!'

'How silly you are!' said his sister, who could look at him now her disclosure was made. 'You always pretend to have low tastes which you haven't really—— Well, I'm glad you're not shocked. I must confess the prospect tempts; only of course he must know my story'—'I'll see to that!' threw in her brother helpfully—'And it's astonishing how much I find I like him. I believed my feelings quite the opposite till he spoke yesterday. You see, from looking after him these two years I have come to regard him as almost belonging to me. And I really am fond of Enid—passionately, the scare of this elopement has taught me. You wouldn't be ashamed of me, Ralph?'

'Rather not! He's a queer old boy and has counter-jumping tricks, but you'd soon lick him into shape. Besides—hang it!—we're not all blue blood. The Farlows, mother's people, were wine merchants and are to this day. Cousin Fred makes me a present of a few dozen sometimes, God bless him for it; he imports good stuff—— Then look at it another way:—Put Enid Glover alongside me, and say which looks the thoroughbred. My father was a peer, hers is a draper. There you have it in a nutshell. Now I've been taken for a cabman——'

'Don't be so absurd, Elmsdale!' Mrs. Garland laughed. 'You like to run yourself down; I fail to see why.'

Just then the glass door from the house opened and a manservant approached, bringing a note on a salver.

'Mr. Anthony brought it to the back-door, my lady, and desired I should take it straight to you. He was very particular about it.'

Mrs. Garland ran her eyes over the missive and said :
'Tell him I shall come at once. Thank you, Bennet.'

When the flunkey had withdrawn she rose with pent excitement.

'I must leave you now, Ralph.'

'What's the row?' asked his lordship, yawning.

'Oh, nothing you know about.'

Her brother took up a newspaper, till presently Bennet came again to say that Mr. Glover required his presence in the breakfast-room, whither repairing he found Kenneth Stoke already seated with their host. The council was summoned to fix a date for the shooting-party postponed through Enid's fault. Profoundly ignorant both of sport and etiquette, old Simon deferred entirely to the judgment of his guests, even submitting the names of people already invited.

The room where sat the triumvirate got light through two great windows looking on the drive by the front-door. It thus commanded the lawns of the near park bathed in sunlight, and dotted that morning with a herd of shorthorns Mr. Glover had lately bought by the advice of his bailiff. Trees alone and in clumps stood in strong relief like islets. Afar off the cattle seemed to wade in the herbage and dying bracken which steamed a little. Two roads from different lodges joined about five hundred yards from the house.

Lord Elmsdale, whose interest in the debate kept flagging, saw through the window nearest him a brougham crawling up one of these drives. He scoffed inwardly at the pace and surmised that some plodding job-horse was between the shafts; but did not exclaim until the carriage had passed the junction of the roads, when he beheld in it the identical conveyance, with the self-same driver, which had brought him from the station. He informed his fellowship of so striking a coincidence. He asked to be blowed if it was not the very same old rattletrap.

Mr. Glover went to the window.

'I expect no one,' he said, 'unless——'

The clause was unfinished, but the two men understood he was harping on Enid.

The fly drew up to the door and some one got out. From their standpoint they could see no more than the horse's head and withers which sloped deplorably. Lord Elmsdale, in all charity, thought it time the poor beast went to the knacker's.

The door opened and Bennet approached his master.

'A gentleman to see you, sir.'

'A gentleman alone?'

'Quite by his self, sir.'

Mr. Glover sighed. 'Well, it can't be important. Show him in here—that is, if his lordship and the captain have no objection. What's his name?'

'He didn't mention it, sir.'

'Some begging tout most likely. Say, Bennet, that I won't receive him without he gives his name. . . . Beggars are the plague of my life,' he explained when the servant had gone. 'They wear a bold face and the servants take 'em for gentlemen and let 'em in, and then they have you. I've had a man call me skinflint in my own drawing-room simply because I was not going to give to some bogus charity——'

The door sprang open and Bennet, in his company voice, bawled: 'Mr. Sidney Boyne.'

The effect was of a thunderbolt. 'Boyne——' murmured Mr. Glover and, red as a turkey-cock, could only bridle and mump with eyes a-gog at the bare-faced intruder.

This was a passably tall young man with colourless hair and brown eyes usually dreamy, restless and uneasy just now. He held out his hand and, no move being made to take it, there was an awkward pause, during which he stood holding his grey crush-hat in one hand while the other, the rejected, stroked his shaven mouth and chin. His eyes shifted from point to point, his face was haggard, and the whole man appeared in some way overwrought. This, added to the eternal sheepishness of your student confronted

with athletes, placed him at a great disadvantage in the battle of stares.

At length he broke the silence, with an inclination towards the old man. 'Mr. Glover, I believe.'

A nod from Lord Elmsdale assured him he was right, but the object of his address made no sign.

'I have to speak to you, sir, on a matter of the deepest importance to my happiness; indeed I may say it is all my life. I should like our interview to be without witnesses, what I have to say being of a strictly private nature.'

Lord Elmsdale and Captain Stoke, foreseeing some such request, were already half-way to the door.

Mr. Glover at last found voice. 'You come alone? Where is my daughter?' they heard him demand huskily, when the other replied with even greater emotion:

'I believed she would have been here by this time. God grant no harm has befallen her! Though I can be nothing but a criminal in your sight, I have dared to come here and beseech your help, your favour—to throw myself on your mercy. You will understand that only the strongest of passions can drive a man naturally diffident to take such a step as this. I am desperate, half-mad since she left me.'

At this point Kenneth, going out last, shut the door and the two disinterested spectators of that strange meeting stood in the hall and gaped at one another.

'Well, I'm——' Lord Elmsdale broke forth in a whisper, employing the strongest expletive in his long vocabulary. 'That chap's got some cheek—pluck, you may call it, for it amounts to that. Must be devilish hard hit, by George! I can feel for the beggar. Deuced nasty thing, a girl bolting from you like that; I've had it happen to myself. And when the poor chap asked no better than to marry her, it's beastly rough I call it.'

Captain Stoke made no reply, seeing Ruth on the staircase bearing down on them. Something unwonted in their attitudes made her inquisitive, so there was nothing for it but to tell her what had occurred, which they accordingly

did, first luring her to the distant smoke-den lest her curiosity should disturb, by an inroad, the colloquy in the breakfast-room. But vain the precaution, for no sooner had she heard all they could tell than she left them, to return presently with further tidings.

‘I don’t like him; he’s not a bit smart,’ she volunteered. ‘And papa was shaking hands with him as if he was some one nice, and has asked him to stay. Hush!—I can hear his portmanteau going up. The house might as well be turned into a hotel at once.’

Lord Elmsdale plunged hands in his pockets and whistled, a trick of his when opposed with a blind wall of incomprehensibleness.

‘But what has become of Enid?’ said Kenneth, flicking a little dust off his boots with a handkerchief.

‘Ah, by all the gums, that’s the question!’ His lordship shook his head and frowned.

‘I rather think she must have gone to Aunt Eliza’s,’ said Ruth. ‘I don’t wonder at her running away from that fright. I say, Kenneth, I believe he’s a poet or something equally impossible. His hair’s rather long.’

They heard the fly drive off, though from the window of the smoking-room they could only see the high trim hedge of the pleasance behind which it moved. The noise of wheels dwindled and died in their ears, and Sidney Boyne was left an inmate of Ditchley Abbey.

CHAPTER XI

WE RETURN TO ENID

FORSAKEN as she conceived herself to be of Lottie, who had promised to rejoin her in a few minutes, and scenting treachery, Enid, without a second's deliberation, got into the carriage from which Mr. Boyne leapt at sight of her.

Her keeping tryst so punctually was a surprise to her lover, used to regard a certain dilatoriness as part of the feminine provocation. The absence of the maid was another marvel till she told how the last minute had changed her mind about bringing her, when wonderment was lost in transport. He quite overlooked her lack of luggage, scarcely even aware that she carried a small dressing-case.

In the carriage she allowed him to take her hand and raise it to his lips, unresisting so long as he gripped it; but the moment his hold relaxed it slid away.

The drive was an ecstasy for him, for her a trance. Neurotic, and by nature diffident, Boyne was, from that very nervousness, capable of strong excitement and exaltation that had the look of effrontery. Enid had snared his imagination, and desire of her now ruled his being, usurping the throne of reason.

The pristine conceit of a maiden's virtue as a fortress to be stormed, while whetting his appetite with a gride of primitive rage, had of late disheartened him; experience tending to the conviction that the very outworks of this fair stronghold were by him impregnable. And here, of her

own accord, she had capitulated ; the proud flag was down and she was his. His thoughts ran riot like a horde of dervishes brandishing weapons and howling thanks to Allah. His mind was a contained frenzy, a sufficient rapture.

They must have journeyed for near two hours ere, in the ashy pallor following sunset, Enid saw the straggling outskirts of a large town : unfinished terraces, with here and there among them trees plumed at the top and isolated like palms in some half-ruined bazaar. The sky beyond the chimneys was grey with smoke.

‘ Ipswich,’ said her companion, in the tone men use in railway-carriages when it is time to collect their baggage.

They drove through streets where the lamps shone as yet with contained rays, blue twilight penning them, a thoroughfare where the footwalks were thronged with people moving in silhouette upon the shine from plate-glass windows ; across an open space before high buildings and down a road of mean houses to a bridge, whence Enid had a fleeting view of the town with its queer-shaped warehouses, chimneys, towers and steeples swathed in mist of lilac, a hue which the muddy river, mirroring the last of sunset, held more clearly. An engine’s whistle, the clank and rumble of a goods-train shunting, announced the station.

Mr. Boyne took Enid to the refreshment-room where he insisted on her eating some sandwiches and drinking a glass of wine. She had known no cravings, but was forced to admit afterwards that his prescription had done her good. She could hear what he said now as something more than a murmur, and his talk being more reasonable than it had been in the fly, she rather welcomed it and made pleasant rejoinder.

Having a moment to herself on the long platform while he was buying their tickets, she really enjoyed the novelty of her position, and observed the groups of people, standing or walking in the lamplight, with thrills of interest, wondering if any one of the girls she saw strolling with young men

were in the same predicament with herself. She considered her swain unobjectionable as he came towards her in his long, loose ulster, to be distinguished as a gentleman in the crowd beginning to thicken. She wondered what Lottie would do about the boxes, what had become of the girl, whether she had intentionally failed her or had simply been caught by the authorities.

The train roared in and there was a stampede of passengers and their friends. Mr. Boyne sent a porter running in search of two corner seats in a first-class compartment. He carried a sheaf of illustrated papers which he gave to her as they took their places. The train moved off amid a flutter of farewells; the station-lamps glided past the windows with progressive speed. Stoke Hill tunnel made a deafness for a time, but they emerged presently to the clear resonance of the evening, and caught a glint of the Orwell among lighted villas, twinkling between the trees.

Enid tried to read but found the gaslight tire her eyes. The other occupant of the compartment, an old lady swaddled up to the eyes in costly wraps, was talkative, and entertained them with her dislike to travel alone. Her fears had been great when the compartment emptied at Ipswich, only their entrance had saved her the grievous pains of getting out to look elsewhere for company. She would have them realise her gratitude.

So the train flew on, the throb of its race shaping itself to a sort of melody in Enid's ears. The ink-blue night swam past the windows like water cloven by a ship at speed. Sometimes there was rustling as they swept through plantations, sometimes a roar as they rolled over a bridge. The stars were out and seemed to rest with them while the world fled by.

Stations, closer together near London, sped past with a flash and a shout; as if, Enid thought, some one, say a policeman, were to flash a lantern on you, exclaim 'Bo!' and then vanish into air. Their fussy fellow-traveller

began to collect her baggage at Romford, sure that the constellation she saw thereabouts could be no other than the world's greatest city.

Mr. Boyne leaned across to Enid.

'Would you like to stop in town to-night, dear?—or go on?'

'Oh, on!—on!' said Enid, adopting the same low tone. She had no idea as to where he meant to take her; that did not matter; but she feared to stop and think. The journey was narcotic, wellnigh an intoxication. She wished it to last for ever.

Great drums of gasworks rose amid a primrose glow, tall chimneys lacking but a statue to become triumphal columns, and then a mist of lighted houses, an illuminated honeycomb, with spires and towers and the hunched roofs of public buildings, having a glamour of unreality. Anon she beheld nothing but a succession of cattle-trucks on which electric lamps, hanging like huge pearls in the night, made a greenish shimmer. Then the train plunged underground, going very slowly, and soon after came to a standstill amid the racket and brightness of Liverpool Street Station.

Having reclaimed his portmanteau Sidney Boyne pulled out his watch.

'We may just do it,' he said.

The valise was forthwith hoisted on to the roof of a hansom cab, and as Enid climbed in she heard him bid the man drive fast to Charing Cross. Even then she did not inquire of their destination, being quite destitute of curiosity. By chance, on their arrival at the other terminus, she overheard him requiring tickets to Ostend.

A porter hurried them to see the portmanteau registered, thence on to the platform where all the officials seemed waiting for them. The door of a compartment was held open by an inspector. Scarcely were they seated ere the train began to move.

Here they were not so fortunate as in the journey up from Ipswich. All the corners were occupied. Mr. Boyne

made himself pretty comfortable notwithstanding, doffed his hat in favour of a peaked cap, and with a smile across at her disposed himself for a snooze. He had not slept for forty-eight hours, and the relief of actually owning her, after all those yearnings, heartaches and misgivings, was soporific now that the first emotion had subsided.

Enid, for her part, was not a bit sleepy. She strove to read one of the papers he had given her at starting from Ipswich, to which she had clung mechanically ever since; but the words were nonsense to her. The pictures too seemed silly, not at all lifelike.

Observing him where he sat bunched up and snoring, she thought he looked anything but nice with his mouth open like that. The cap too was unbecoming. Asleep thus, he resembled some animal, she could not decide which, and gave an impression of snarling. He woke up with a start when the train, having passed through Dover town, was crawling out on to the Admiralty Pier, going jerkily because of the junction points.

They supped together on the steamboat and then went on deck. It was a fair, moonless night. The sea tossed inky crests around them, seeming elastic as an accordion to the girl's fancy. Its darkness looked solid under the paler sky. To larboard the lights of a seaport town appeared like glow-worms a-creep on the rim of a brimming bowl.

Presently Mr. Boyne, with a muttered excuse, left her alone to enjoy the prospect. His absence lengthened from minutes into hours, and she grew annoyed at his neglect, though far from uncomfortable, being well wrapped up and ensconced in a lazy chair, a tarpaulin over her knees, elated by the slight buoyancy of the ship's motion.

After a long while the submerged land uprose on the other side, and she beheld the lights of Ostend shine along the hem of the sky which just there had an olive tinge. Not until the steamer entered harbour, and her movement lost its swing, did Sidney Boyne reappear, looking rather green as she saw by the flash of a lamp. He admitted ill-

ness, and she hoped it was nothing serious ; whereupon he unfolded his meaning—sea-sickness—and she wondered much, having supposed that sympathetic sinking and upheaval to affect men only in Biscayan gales. She herself had not felt the least discomfort in the crossing.

A crowd of touts beset them on their passage to and emerging from the custom-house, but Boyne dealt with them, talking very glibly in French which was an unmeaning jabber to Enid, though in the schoolroom she had been called proficient in that article. The discovery of this new talent did somewhat to re-establish her regard for him.

They were led along silent quays by a bustling officious person, clad in a sort of uniform culminating in a gold lace cap with a shiny peak, to an hotel where Boyne ordered rooms, while Enid stood by, dazed with the sleepiness which a sense of being once more within doors threw on her. It was a relief to find herself in a large and well-appointed bedroom where, having opened her dressing-case, she quickly disrobed and said her prayers, curtailed by the imperative craving for sleep. Her last consciousness ere she sank into dreamless rest was of Boyne tapping at her door and saying that his was the next room in case she should be alarmed or want anything ; to which she replied : ‘ Thank you. Good-night.’ It did not seem at all strange.

But it was a shock, waking on a fine afternoon, to find him actually in her bedroom, leaning over her, covering her face and neck with kisses. This it was which had aroused her.

She lay rigid, speechless with shame and rage, then thrust out her hands, and with all her might pushed him away. It was with a flush she remembered her arms were bare and made haste to hide them again. He laughed a little, as thinking it play. She could have killed him for that laugh !

‘ Dearest, I thought I’d come and give you my welcome. . . . Now, love, you’ve only to press this button and a sort of

high tea will be brought up to you here ; I've ordered what I hope you'll like. I'm going out now to try and see the consul and chaplain, and make arrangements for our marriage as soon as possible. You had better stop in until I come back.'

Getting not a word, he added : ' Well, dear ? '

' I hear you,' said Enid, nearly choking.

' Tired, my poor darling ? Well, I'll go now.'

As he shut the door she sprang out of bed and bolted it.

Oh the meanness—the pitiable, the hateful meanness—in him whom she had not till yesterday allowed to touch her gloved hand with his lips, whom she had thought so reverent, so submissive ; to come while she slept and sully her with such kisses ! Her whole face burned, and her neck almost to the bosom. It had all been so confused, such a bewilderment ; and she, still heavy from sleep, unable at once to conceive it. She poured some water into the basin and fell to sponging her face, anxious to wash off the defilement.

She dressed as quickly as she could, but her hair gave her much ado, for she was unused to tire it with her own hands. Her arrangement of it looked so untidy, that she at last bethought herself to ring for the chambermaid, of whom she begged a net to keep it trim. The woman admired the chestnut mass and, deploring its present plight, insisted on herself dressing it in the Parisian manner, which she declared made of mademoiselle an angel.

Of this good Samaritan Enid inquired when the next boat started for England, and was told that one would steam for Dover in about two hours from then, and another, much cheaper and, as the chambermaid put it, not so *comme il faut*, was advertised to leave about the same time for London direct. Enid thanked her with a gratuity and asked to have tea sent up to her at once. A further hesitating request for her bill evoked such wide-eyed amazement that she was glad to slur over the remark as a blunder in French.

Before breaking her fast, she asked the waiter to bring her an envelope and pen and ink, which he presently did, together with a host of accessories such as blotting-pad, a penwiper, sealing-wax, and a quantity of notepaper. Thrusting two five-pound notes in the envelope, she stuck it down and addressed it to Mr. Boyne. Then she put on her hat and gloves, took up her umbrella and the dressing-case and descended, entrusting her note to the smirking proprietor as she went out.

The whole sea-front refracted the afternoon sun with a dazzle she had never known in England. The houses, though nearly all of one pattern, were of many colours, the various hues giving to the vast terrace a gaily striped appearance, which was borne out by serried ranks of parti-coloured bathing-machines along the verge of a tumbling blue sea flecked with white horses elusive as quicksilver. The wind was high. Many people were out battling with it on the digne and on the beach.

Walking towards the harbour, she met a man with a brass label on his cap wheeling a barrow, whom she asked to direct her to the London steamer. The porter replied in broken English and, being unemployed for the moment, constituted himself her guide.

CHAPTER XII

ENID IS STRANGELY UPLIFTED

ENID had chosen the inexpensive route, not to save her purse which was still well-lined, but to minish the chances of pursuit by Boyne. For the same reason, going on board, she went immediately to the ladies' cabin, a stuffy hole beneath the stairway.

Hard by was the saloon where some men stood talking loudly or drinking already, persons of no great refinement by their voices. There was a ceaseless din of people going up or down the ladder, which clanked like an anvil to footfalls owing to the brass on every step.

The stewardess, a weary slattern, asked Enid if she had booked a berth in advance and, being answered in the negative, assigned her a resting-place near the floor, no better-looking than a cupboard-shelf. Enid in disgust signified her intention to pass the night on deck, when the woman promised to provide her with coverings.

At length, when she had grown tired of waiting, shouts, and an increased stir overhead, informed her that the moorings were being slipped. Feeling the vessel move and hearing the first tentative splash of the paddles, she dared mount to the upper deck, thankful to escape from the noisome smother of the cabin.

The wind had dropped, but the sea was still tumultuous, tumbling in grey out of the glowing west. Hues of the sky, from which the sun had now quite withdrawn, were delicately luminous as of a flower in shadow. Low in occident the new moon, a thin pale crescent like the paring of a

finger-nail, was sucked downward in the moil of sunset. The waves, no longer white-crested, shimmered at their dancing peaks with the last of day, while in the depths night lurked already, in coils that broke to join again beneath the surface sheen, like a dance of snakes.

Smoke issued furry from the funnel and trailed away in the steamer's wake, marking the course she had come with a lengthening thin cloud like a furled awning. Leaning on the railing of the central platform, afore the bridge, Enid saw the high-decked prow taper dark to the bowsprit upon the wanness of sea and sky. Between gaped a chasm where inferior passengers strode wretchedly among luggage and bales of merchandise. It reminded her dimly of those Spanish galleons seen in old pictures which had castles at poop and stern and a gulf amidships.

She inhaled the salt breeze with a relief that came near to exhilaration. Sailors in shabby apparel were employed in lighting the steamer's lamps which, with their eyes of green, red and yellow peering in the dove-grey twilight, enhanced the weird effect of her motion, gently rocking with the waves.

A bell rang, and seeing people hurrying to the saloon she went also, feeling rather hungry. But appetite became loathing when she found herself almost the only woman at a table full of noisy men, who spoke with tongues of the shop and warehouse, some of whom ogled her when they paused in the work of eating to pick teeth or sip their beer. The stench down there was nauseous. Unable to relish any of the fare provided she did not sit out the meal, but returned on deck after begging the steward to have tea sent up to her.

Sitting on a camp-stool at her former point of vantage, her spirits revived somewhat. The stars were out by that time, though a glimmer of sunset still hung in the green west. The tea was brought, and she drank it with great refreshment. Then, tired of sitting, she paced the deck a while, now and then stopping to look over the bulwark at the seething foam below.

The pant of the engines, the splash of the paddles and an occasional hoarse voice from the bridge, with footbeats of passengers, were islanded in the still night.

The phosphorescence of the sea was wonderful, a thing she had heard of but never seen till then. The steamship seemed to progress on rollers of ghostly fire from which it kept dashing slivers that shot forth keen as a sword-thrust, flashed far over the dark waters, and vanished in a trice. In the churning race from the paddles foam floated like cream on the surface, and spumed beneath it in the guise of some waterweed, fine as maidenhair, thick as moss, and white as driven snow ; the whole seen clearly as if blue fire burned in the depths beneath.

The case of personal detachment amid new sights and noises, that receptive attitude as of listening which is essential to any rapture of contemplation, had never before been Enid's. It partook of revelation, the birthjoy of a new faculty, like the rise of the butterfly, a joyous change in her whole posture towards earth. High-strung, adrift and lonely, she was the harp of circumstance ; vision laid a finger on the cords of feeling, her soul answered and sight was one with sensation.

Meshed in dreamy thought, she was leaning on the ship's side when she became aware that one of the boors who had disgusted her at the supper-table was standing near. Something informed her he would speak if she hung there longer ; so she walked away, pointing her avoidance with a regal stiffness.

Most of the men walking sentry-wise up and down had eyes for her. She caught snatches of their conversation on puffs of tobacco smoke, catchwords of a farce to which she was not attending, wherein h's were gratuitously dropped and inserted. Some women whispering in their seats as she passed by gave her an inkling that it was thought fast for a girl to walk alone about the deck. In a trice she was all uneasiness, feeling hapless, unqualified to direct her own actions.

At last, in the ship's bows, she stumbled on a coil of ropes in a dark corner. Beginning to be sleepy, she repaired to the cabin and reminded the stewardess of her promise of wraps, furnished with which she returned on deck.

Warmly covered and curled up in her nest of cordage, she was quite unseen of the promenaders who sometimes stood almost in contact with her without suspecting that a girl lay there. She seemed to hear tongues of people she knew, of her father, of Mrs. Garland, of Ruth, of Sidney Boyne and Mr. Calderon, of Lottie and the old Anthonies; the drone of a single cockney tourist sometimes taking on the inflections of three or four familiar voices in succession. Coming sleep endued the mind with the property of inconsequent evocation it has in dreams. Once or twice, deceived for a moment, she strained ears to hearken, and in a start of wakefulness found herself hanging on the indifferent talk of strangers. Gradually all sounds grew muffled and she fell asleep.

Once she awoke half-dazed. A Frenchman standing over her was exclaiming: '*Enfin, voilà Margate! Hein, mon vieux?*' in tones of satisfaction. An English voice said: 'There's Southend.'

Turning her head a little without raising it, she could see through a hawse-hole, beyond the black water gliding stealthily, a trail of lights along the sea's rim, like a weary snake of fire. Coloured lamps of ships entered and left the picture, changing position silently and as if by prearrangement in a well-ordered ceremony.

After that she was roused at frequent intervals, once by a brief stoppage of the boat, when in the same circular frame she had a picture of the serpent Thames with its many lights, like a black scarf sewn with jewels.

When she bestirred herself finally, a succession of fishing-smacks were flitting seaward down the vast dim waterway, each coarse tan sail looking fragile as a moth's wing in the pearl-grey mist before the dawn. Æsthetic sadness lapped her heart, a spiritual hunger. The vision of daybreak was

new to her, and at the first approach it chilled like the breeze of a new world clean of passion. The early morning air was pure and strong, without taint or savour of humanity. It was like immersion in ice-cold water, only for the strong; and she felt faint, delicate, and ephemeral, a creature too frail for the ordeal. But with walking to and fro she got reconciled to the hour's rigour.

Taking stand abaft the funnel, and gazing to stern, she watched the east open like a rose and was comforted. The impersonal joy she had experienced overnight waxed now an ecstasy, a possession, as myriads of rose-petals, pink, pale yellow, and snow-white, rained in the lap of the apple-green water and dwelt there tinging the haze. The vigorous fresh air which had at first seemed hostile now exhilarated, wholesomely castigating her young blood to sanity. Distempered phantoms which had beset her brain of late, blind in the healthful light, and discredited, groped helplessly for their wonted plea which was not forthcoming.

She derided her own aberration, ridiculed herself for ever having fled her father's house. She even felt sorry for Mr. Boyne, seeing his misdemeanour so reduced as to seem almost trifling. Yet she was glad to be free. A deep-drawn sigh of thanksgiving marked her perception of the gulf escaped. She wondered at her present elation to which even shameful thoughts contributed as notes to a chord of music.

Standing thus at gaze, her soul in her eyes, which caught the flash and colour of the rising sun, her hair disordered from sleep, blown a little before her face by the draught of the steamer's going, she made a picture of youth or faith or courage according to the beholder's predilection: the three were one in her heart at that time. From the deck below one or two male travellers, puffed and frowsy from a night's unrest, stared up at her, slightly mystified. They sniggered together. The pose of the well-dressed girl was so free, so unconscious, as in the minds of those children of habit to justify some strictures passed on her the night before.

The sun rose, crowned with a flaming glory. She basked, lips parted, in the warmth and dazzle which awoke iridescence in certain oily patches afloat on the river. There was matter for rejoicing in his reappearance to shine without favour alike on good and evil. It guaranteed a steadfast Power behind. She caught a hint of the world as a time-long book in which the life of one man or woman is at best but a fair word written, at worst a blot. Self was all but lost in a flood of aspirations the fairer for being useless as men reckon. She heard elemental music of the flood and shore intermingling in a pæan of the whole earth.

Self coming again in the ascendant brought with it the accusation of untidiness, never without its horror to the minds of dainty women, for whom fair tendance of the body is a thing of course. She heaved a sigh as she went below. It was like the return from some high initiation, a voluntary dropping of the veil which had been lifted a little way for her.

At starting from Ostend it had been Enid's intention, though vague, to seek refuge with her devout Aunt Eliza, relying on that relative's known charity for all who strayed. But now the flood of healthy fancies inspired by the day-spring had purged her mind of ghosts, false shame among them, and she resolved to go straight home. The measure of self-abasement involved in this course commended it to her present quixotic mood. It would come near, she thought, to atone for all that had been underhand in her former conduct.

After a cup of coffee she found a chair on deck and sat watching the steamer's passage up that wondrous road which leads to the heart of the fog-robed queen of millions. The banks closed in, becoming thickly clothed with buildings. The waterway, smooth as polished malachite, seemed a vast wide street worthy the world's chief city. The steamer paddling slowly, a sailing-boat, and a lighter or two, troubled the glassy pavement with their motion. Ahead it glittered away between banks of purple mist, and the dome

of St. Paul's rose presently, brooding over the sleeping town like a hen with chickens.

The packet drew up to a dingy wharf where a few men waited to handle the ropes. The splash of the paddles grew intermittent, shouting incessant. Enid having no luggage to consider went on shore as soon as the gangway was set. Along a slimy quay and up some dark green steps she came at length into a narrow lane or gully, sunken deep between high warehouses, in which a few cabs waited.

The City streets, in blue shadow for the most part, swarmed with men of business hurrying to work. Everything, even to the names on shops and office-doors, interested her.

Alighting at Liverpool Street, she gave a crown-piece to the cabman, at which he stared.

'Isn't it enough?' she asked anxiously, feeling again for her purse.

The man was sorely tempted, yet after a brief but fierce tussle with his guardian angel the bright one vanquished and he replied:

'Quite right. Thank ye, Miss.'

In the train, hurled towards Ditchley, thoughts of her father's wrath, his possible repudiation, assailed her. Pondering how best to face him, it struck her that she might have recourse to Mrs. Garland. No one could doubt the discretion of that lady; and memories of her untiring kindness, under opposition which now seemed shameful, emboldened the penitent to count on her good offices.

CHAPTER XIII

AT THE THATCHED LODGE

EXHILARATED by the four-mile walk from Elmondham, through open country with the song of skylarks everywhere around her, Enid at last entered the shade of the Abbey woods through which a road runs hooded for about a mile.

Leaves reft from the great oaks and beeches by the recent gale strewed the lane like hedge-clippings; but their loss was mere riddance to the giants, whose foliage, layer on layer, was a maze overhead of intricate green lights and shades through which eyes rambled aloft to the prying blue. Through the wooden palings green with age the underwood, untouched by the sun, was still filmed with gossamer as at the dawning, though it was then towards noon.

The thatched roof of old Tom Anthony's lodge, part shadowed by the woodland, part in the soft rich sunshine of a clearing, appeared of the hue and texture of rabbit-skin. At the gate she was swooped upon by Martha who, with tight lips and wide eyes, came rushing out at sight of her. Old Thomas, who had been grubbing in the plot of garden, flung down his trowel and followed, oblivious of coat and waistcoat.

They were standing all three together in the sitting-room kept like a shrine, when Enid broached the plan she had in mind, and Martha snorted disapproval.

'I'm sure, Miss Enid dear, you're kindly welcome to stop along of us for months and years. . . . But 'er! You won't get no good by sendin' for 'er, and so I tell yer, as

was always your enemy and the enemy of all. It's plain to see who she's a-settin' 'er cap at, makin' short work as she 'ave of all what belonged to your dear ma and could remind 'im of 'er —— Well, the idea! . . . Why, 'twas 'er drove you out of the 'ouse with 'er cruelty!

'No, no; you're mistaken. She has always been most kind. I will write a note to her now, if Thomas will be kind enough to take it up to the Abbey?'

'To be sure, my dear,' said Old Anthony, who to be of service would have hanged himself that minute in his braces, he so joyed to behold her safe and well.

Half an hour later Mrs. Garland sailed into the sitting-room at the lodge in a whirl of solicitude.

'My love!'

She had come walking, and was somewhat out of breath. Enid knew in her arms the repose which the shadow of a wise and strong woman is to girlhood. Mrs. Anthony scowled at her in closing the door.

'I have brought Charlotte,' said the comforter, having kissed Enid again and again. There was something tonic in these endearments, in part ascribable to the flavour of fresh air clinging to the lady from her hurried walk.

Enid's glance at Lottie, who hung sheepish in the background, was doubtful till Mrs. Garland spoke for her.

'She was in no way to blame, dear, as she will explain to you herself by and by. She was detained at home but did her utmost to overtake you. I suppose I ought to be angry with her for such fidelity, but just now I can't find it in my heart. . . . Now, Charlotte, go and talk to Mrs. Anthony for a little while. Miss Enid and I have a lot to say to each other.'

As Enid entered on her confession shame rose on her cheeks and in her eyes, which became fixed on the view from the window—the inner side of the wrought-iron portals set in stone pillars, a section of the drive and a congregation of great trees. Gazing thus, in the course of her story she saw the lodgekeeper trot out and open the gates for

the entrance of a fly, whose driver touched his depressed topper with a roughly gloved hand in acknowledgment. The appearance and disappearance of the vehicle affected Enid's eyes alone, interesting her no more than the crawl of a real fly on the panes through which she watched it.

Having heard the whole tale, Mrs. Garland caught both Enid's hands and drew her round, compelling the deep blue eyes to look at her.

'I feel I ought to scold you, Enid—to be very angry with you. But I can't. I never was angry, and most of the grief I felt was lost yesterday in the relief of learning that it was not that man Miles, but some one with the traditions of a gentleman——'

Enid grimaced. 'Miles—a servant! Whatever possessed you to think of it? How could any girl stoop to a man like that?'

'Don't, love!' whispered Mrs. Garland, flinching as if for pain. 'I did.'

'You!—Oh, I am so sorry!'

Enid sought some expression which might alleviate the wound she had unwittingly dealt, and was silent in confusion.

'Yes, dear, that is my story; or the crucial part of it. Now you see why I was angry with you for letting the man ride beside you that morning——' Mrs. Garland's voice grew firm again; 'But how's this? We've changed places and I'm the culprit instead of you. . . . Well, my love, you had better stay here till I have sounded your father and can judge of his disposition. I'm sure he will come round eventually—that is, in a day or two. And then comes your trial. Poor Enid! You will have to live a scandal down, and you don't know what that means. You must summon all your courage, all your pride. I leave you Charlotte. Your box shall be fetched with hers from that inn. Farewell for the present, and please think of me always as a friend.'

She went out, and after speaking to Lottie, who at sound

of a door opening came with Martha to the threshold of the kitchen, left the lodge, nodding kindly to Mrs. Anthony's defiant courtesy. Old Thomas, who had not a grain of malice in his composition, left off gardening, his perpetual pastime, to open the little gate for her. Enid watched her walk off up the road dappled with leaf-shade and wondered what would come of her mediation.

Enid enjoyed the treat of an unconstrained long talk with Lottie, her one real intimate. Their friendship was of the present, a blowing flower, not a dry and sapless everlasting like the memorial sentiments prescribed by duty and old habit. They told their respective stories piecemeal in the way of chat; and Enid found it hard to paint the elation she had experienced on the steamboat, which yet sounded in her brain as dominant, seeming to redeem and lighten the whole shady adventure. Lottie strove to conjecture it.

'That must be like conversion, Miss. By what I've heard, people getting saved feel just what you did. They say it's not for everybody, and it isn't Church teaching, I know; but meetings hold that there are favourites. It doesn't seem fair, does it, Miss?'

Enid, slightly shocked, said positively: 'There was absolutely nothing religious in what I felt. It was all physical, I think.'

When Lottie laughingly narrated her treatment of the butcher-boy, Enid was scandalised. But, seeing the mischief was wrought entirely for her sake, she could not well feign anger.

Once, a noise of wheels drawing both girls to the window, they saw Captain Stoke driving Ruth out in the dog-cart, a groom with folded arms swaying on the back seat; and again, in the flare of evening, when the gloom of the trees was seen through the beams as through a fall of blushing gauze, they witnessed the return of the couple.

The sun had some time set; Mrs. Anthony had placed a lighted lamp on the sitting-room table and was pulling down the blind, when the small iron gate of the garden

clashed, and some one came up the path. Martha hied to the door.

'Sure there's no answer?' they heard her inquire. The reply was positive, followed by the retreat of footsteps to the gate which clanged again as Martha gave a note into Enid's hand.

It ran :

'There is the strangest complication. On my return from seeing you, I found Mr. Boyne installed here with your father's favour. He had only been here half an hour, and yet had won a firm footing. Elmsdale tells me he seems quite beside himself, poor fellow; and certainly he must be very fond of you to take so bold a course and win over your father so entirely to his side. Should you after all find that, deep down in your heart, there is still a lurking regard for him, you would not, I fancy, have much difficulty in bringing him on his knees in apology for that intrusion on your privacy at Ostend, which was certainly ungentleman-like. If you find yourself at all relenting, I should decidedly assume a distance, greater perhaps than I felt, in order to punish so grave an offence of *lèse-majesté*. A woman should never let pass an affront like that; it touches our suzerainty.

'I have not yet had the opportunity I look for to speak with your father alone; he has been so taken up with Mr. Boyne with whom I have barely exchanged a word. But I hope to get a chance directly, as I heard him just now ask the visitors to excuse him as he wished to write a letter. When I have written and despatched this, I shall go straight to the study and do my utmost for you. He has been blustering in Mr. Boyne's behalf ever since that gentleman's arrival, promising to put constraint on you; but I don't think there is much in it besides talk, and I have the greater hope of finding him reasonable that I can see he is disconcerted and anxious at your non-appearance.

'I never remember feeling so nervous of an interview as I do of this impending. So much hangs on it.

‘ By the way, I am distinctly annoyed with Ruth, whom it pleases to be almost pointedly rude to your aspirant.

‘ Yours,

‘ HERMIA.’

Enid stared past Lottie’s fair head, bent studiously over a book to avoid seeming inquisitive, at the pattern of the wall-paper. She saw a net closing round her.

CHAPTER XIV

SIDNEY BOYNE IS TRIED AND TESTED

IN the sitting-room appropriated to her use, Hermia had just finished writing her note to Enid, and was fitting it into an envelope, when Lord Elmsdale looked in, saying, 'I'm off to the study to tell old Glover.'

Before she could question him, or even guess at his meaning, the door shut again and he was gone.

With the unclosed letter in her hand she sat and stared before her, a vertical crease between the brows and a contraction of the lips indicating trouble. That Ralph should have forestalled her with Mr. Glover was most unfortunate. The nature of his communication dawning on her, it seemed a grievous and compromising blunder that he should go expressly to make it. The more delicate way would have been to wait until chance placed him alone with his host, and then impart the matter as a confidence accidentally drawn from him. The awkwardness of facing her employer so soon after the disclosure of her wretched first marriage, and meeting his changed look whether of scorn or commiseration, must seriously impair her efficiency as Enid's champion.

Elmsdale always did bungle commissions. She ought to have known better than to confide in him.

As she sat thus, gazing out over the garden, doubtful whether to postpone her interview with Mr. Glover or to go at once, Ruth and Captain Stoke entered her range of vision—two dark figures somewhat below the eye-line. A sky-flush, faint and hectic, strove with the earth's gloom

of massy greens and browns fast deepening into night. Kenneth was smoking; Ruth's gait had a nestling bent. The couple turned at the end of the lawn when the lady's bearing was all at once transformed. Her chin tilted and she walked erect. The tones of her voice grew so loud that some words and a laugh reached the on-looker distinctly.

Hermia watched with the smile of an observer at the first phase of a well-known phenomenon, pending its further development. This was not slow in coming; for presently Mr. Boyne entered the picture of paradisaic love which the window framed for her. His dejected, slinking figure, evidently in search of company, might have stood for that of the evil principle prowling towards love to destroy it; the undesired third person at any rate, snakish in his power to shatter dreams of bliss, whom every child of Eve and Adam tries instinctively to crush.

Face to face with the lovers, Mr. Boyne lifted his cap and spoke—probably of the weather, for Ruth made the remark a pretext to avert her face and stare upwards at a flock of pink and purple clouds huddled closely together. Hermia could hear what followed.

The flush in the east boded rain; Sidney dwelt upon the point, to which Kenneth subscribed politely. He then craved a light for his cigarette, which was granted with the same grave courtesy; Ruth strolling on in manifest disgust. The required glow caught from the live end of Captain Stoke's cigar, a light film of smoke dispersed in the twilight about Mr. Boyne like breath on a frosty day; and more at ease, as though the civility made a bond between them:

‘My position here is rather a strange one—very uncomfortable for me as you may imagine. I am sure Miss Glover and every one thinks me an intruder . . .’

‘Oh, not at all—er—’ said Kenneth Stoke in embarrassment, looking after Ruth who, withdrawn out of earshot, was striking attitudes of impatience.

‘I assure you, when I came here this morning,’ pursued

the interloper, warming to the conversation, 'I had not the least idea—indeed, looked for quite the reverse . . .'

'You will excuse me,' said Captain Stoke, bowing and with redoubled politeness; 'Miss Glover and I were in the middle of a private talk. I must really rejoin her.'

'Oh, certainly—of course!' said the other, with the wriggle of a hooked worm; and he strolled on disconsolately, puffing his cigarette.

At this point Hermia, sorry for Enid's admirer, finally stuck down the flap of the envelope and left the window. Having selected a messenger and bidden him make haste to the lodge, she threw a lace wrap over her head and went out through the French window of the drawing-room. At the corner of the house she came upon Mr. Boyne.

'I was looking for you,' she said. 'You must think us rude to leave a guest to his own devices. But you see, every one is upset about this misfortune of Enid. You, who are mainly responsible for our grief and anxiety can hardly blame us, I think.'

'My dear lady, if I could only do something to help!' His face grew bright and eager, almost beautiful in the gloaming. 'I would give my life to bring her back, even though she were never to be mine. The fear that she may have done something reckless grows on me every minute, and is almost more than I can bear.'

'Let us walk this way, do you mind?' said Hermia, taking his arm as if he had offered it, and leading towards an iron gate which admitted to the outer park. The glade beyond was dusk and silent as a vast grey aisle. Moss hushed their footsteps so that they seemed to float in the twilight.

'There are one or two things I cannot understand. Why did she leave you? Elopement is a serious step for any girl. Shame locks a door behind her, and only to escape from greater shame will she incur the humiliation of knocking at it and seeking re-admittance.'

'But she has not knocked. . . . She has not sought

re-admittance,' interjected Sidney at once eagerly and despairingly.

'And from that you argue that she left you unprovoked?'

There was anticipation of triumph in Hermia's manner. Her hand on his arm was a mere link of circumstance, felt by him as temporary and even conditional. It chained him but left her free. He recognised her mastery of the situation.

'Without any provocation whatever?' she insisted.

During his pause of hesitation, the sweep of her skirts over turf was audible with the faint sough of a breeze in the tree-tops.

'Not exactly . . .' he began at length. 'The fact is, I did something I perhaps ought not to have done. I thought nothing of it—had no doubts at the time; but since it has struck me that that must be the reason. It was not so very shocking. From my point of view, it was natural. As we were going to be married I thought nothing of it.'

His rather involved speech left a note of interrogation in her ears, which proceeded from its general tone, no question having been put. She faced to go back, and, governed by the touch of her fingers, he turned with her. The interview with Mr. Glover lay before her, and delay might forfeit the occasion. She could not devote much more time to probing this lover's conscience.

'How can I give an opinion till I know what is in question?' she said quietly.

'Well, it's awkward for me to tell it, but I don't know why I should not,' said Sidney, almost blustering in the height of nervousness. At any ordinary time he could not, to save his life, have made the disclosure; but two days crowded with excitements had strung him up to a kind of boldness, the indifference to circumstances and consequences of a man in dreams who does not believe them real. As they walked back up the avenue, some lights of the Abbey shining among dark trees before them, he made full confession, winding up with a fiery declaration of love for

Enid. It was killing him, he vowed, as a heart-broken plea for compassion and help.

She judged him honest, and pity for him influenced her somewhat in the subsequent interview with Mr. Glover, which was hurried and less formal than for Enid's sake she could have wished. She met him coming out of the study, and he took her hand.

'Hermia—I may call you that, may I not?—your brother has just left me. I have heard all, and it makes no difference. Did you think it would? Was that what made you send him?'

A new kindness in his voice touched her. She felt utterly at his mercy, beneath his feet; yet she did not resent the humiliation, which had its sweetness.

'I have something to tell you,' she said. 'I should have said it before if I could have found you alone.'

'About Enid?' he exclaimed abruptly, searching her face.

'Where is she?—in the house?'

'Down at the lodge for the present. I do hope you will not be hard on her?'

'I am not a hard man, I hope,' he replied, rather hurt by the aspersion. 'But I must insist on her marrying this young fellow whom she chose for herself. There's no hardship in that. The scandal has got about, and a quick marriage is the only way out of it. I like Mr. Boyne; and anyhow he is her choice, not mine. She must abide by it. I can't have my name made a laughing-stock for a mere whim of hers. What made her run from him; did she tell you?'

Hermia recounted the story briefly. Fresh from her interview with the culprit she made lighter of the incident than would have been the case had she heard but Enid's version. Her new abasement before Mr. Glover robbed her of all virtue as a pleader.

'Faugh!' he exclaimed when she had done. 'All this fuss and bother about nothing at all—a bit of shyness. I shall go to her at once. He drew out his watch, glancing

from its small gold face to the white dial of a great clock facing the hall-door. 'I shan't be long, but don't wait dinner for me . . . Bennet! Run and order the brougham, and then bring my thin overcoat to the study . . . "Don't be hard on her"! There you go again, my dear. As if I was likely to be hard on my favourite child. I'll forgive her; only she must hear reason, that's all. Does Boyne know she's back? I've a good mind to take him with me.'

'Don't do that—for my sake!' whispered Hermia, a hand on his arm in her anxiety to prevent a false step.

'Well then, I won't,' he said softly, in high good-humour; and, ere it could slip away, he patted her hand on his sleeve.

Hermia was conscious of having shown herself but a sorry advocate; but the commotion of her own inward state prevented much penitence. She had lost something, a part of her pride or self-respect; but she had gained much more. The sense of gain was positive. Before her the road was swept. Contrasting its cleanness with muddy ways she had traversed in the past, she could not but own relief.

CHAPTER XV

ENID SUCCUMBS TO AUTHORITY, LOTTIE TO IMPULSE

ENID pondered Mrs. Garland's letter. It was plain to her how marriage with Mr. Boyne after all, by putting the conventional seal on her outbreak, would quiet scandal and raise her from the position of a criminal, socially speaking, to that of heroine in a small romance.

She considered all the ardent and fierce human passions led chained in the great decorous dance of society; and could see that, to safeguard the stately measure, there must be laws remorseless as those of the Medes and Persians against the least unruliness of those convicts. Slaves and gladiators, though useful or amusing in subjection, have broken loose and shaken a strong state. And women being the very heart and rallying-point of this civilisation, bearing its standard of the golden lilies, its laws were especially drastic on transgressors of that sex. For all such its code was Draconian, having but one penalty—ostracism, the social death; which, in a case like hers, where the offence remained unconsummated, could yet be evaded either at a stroke by marriage, or gradually by full and ceremonial submission, a torture of months and years comparable to that parade of the penitent of old in white shift, candle in hand, through a jeering mob to shrift and sanctuary. That way of absolution was too shameful to contemplate. Marriage remained as the yoke she must pass under to reinstatement in the good graces of the world so-called.

The expediency of peace with him shone glaring. But her heart revolted from a match which promised to

accommodate her like a smug usurer. Something said that the interest on its loan of convenience would be ruinous, and breed heartache by and by.

Reading that letter through again, the bias of the writer grew plain to her. A wish expressed, though not written, transpiring from the scrawled paper like the odour of a subtle drug, had conjured up that vision of society.

It may have been an hour after the note was received, there came the noise of a carriage pulling up, and the voice of Mr. Glover giving command. Lottie fled to the kitchen and besought Martha on no account to let fall that she was in attendance on Enid. She had not seen the master since that trying hour in the study.

Her father kissed Enid and inquired kindly of her health. That done, he begged Martha and Thomas, who lingered obsequious in the doorway, to withdraw; and, laying his hat on the table, sat down, crossed his legs and opened business. He offered definite terms to his daughter, harping on the hypothesis that he was not a hard man. Either she would agree to marry poor Boyne and silence tongues, or he would allow her something to live right away where her name could not be associated with his as a slur upon it. Sidney Boyne was a gentleman: he was strong on that point. What was more, he liked the young fellow, the little he had seen of him, extremely. Had it not been for Mrs. Garland's advocacy, he as good as stated, he would have brought him to visit her that evening, and had the matter settled there and then. As it was, he gave her two days in which to think over his proposal.

With that he got up.

Enid had not said a word. As she stood there, her face in the tempered gloom cast by the lampshade on the upper half of the room, he looked hard at her with something of a shock.

'My child,' he murmured in a much softer tone; 'do try and see reason. It is for your good I am thinking—— As you stand there, your face is just your mother's. It makes

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me creep to look at you. And to think you have caused us all this trouble—you, my own girl, my favourite! And after all I've spent to turn you out superfine!

Still Enid found nothing to say. She too had an eerie feeling as she looked at that face, once so dear to her, which was now but the mask of an ill-wisher. She managed to murmur 'Good-night' beneath his parting kiss. It was matter for a little gratitude that he did not insist on an immediate answer.

On the morrow, which was rainy, she had three visitors; Mrs. Garland suave, and Ruth snappish as usual, called on her in the morning on their way to do some shopping in Elmondham. The former made no allusion to Enid's troubles. But the latter inveighed against 'the creature Boyne' in terms which called the hearer to arms in his defence, as Mrs. Garland noticed with a smile. Then, in the afternoon, came Mr. Freely, trudging up from Ditchley in a mackintosh and thick boots, to see her.

He was a great friend and her director, as far as she can be said to have had one, in things spiritual. Having got the gist of her story, he fixed on self-worship as her besetting sin, and in his cheery way read her a lecture. He adduced the wisdom of the Church catechism. There was a duty towards God, she could read, and a duty towards her neighbour—humanity, that was; not a hint of a duty towards herself. Admitting the existence of such a duty, it was comprised in the first and quite lost therein.

He left her wondering what he could mean. Conscience acquitted her of wilful selfishness, a vice she detested.

The next day was that of the shooting-party. All the morning the sky lowered but no rain fell. The bang of guns was distant in the forenoon, the shooters moving in the open country beyond the Abbey. But after lunch they came to the tract of fields towards Ditchley village, with the thatched lodge for starting-point.

Peeping from the lattice the two girls saw the tribe of beaters, marshalled outside the gates, watched over by two

gamekeepers as dogs watch sheep. Amid this ragged crew Lottie espied her victim, the butcher-boy, and pointed him out to Enid.

‘I thought he lived at Elmondham,’ said Enid.

‘He did live there, but he belongs to Ditchley. He must be home for a bit. I hope it isn’t that he’s lost his place.’

Several gentlemen came just then on foot from the Abbey, and wheels could be heard in the distance bringing more. Lord Elmsdale, walking with a man in whom Enid thought she recognised Mr. Calderon, saw the faces at the window and lifted his hat with an expansive smile. His companion just raised his cap and glanced at the window but quickly looked away—with heightened colour, as Enid thought. She bowed in return, and was amazed to catch Lottie bowing too.

‘It was his lordship drove me from the station, Miss. He was very kind; I think I told you,’ said the culprit demurely, with a blush.

Turning from the window with a face of disillusionment, Enid thought fit to reprove Lottie for her treatment of the lad they had seen among the beaters. She utilised much that Mr. Freely had said to herself on the previous day. It was rather a long scolding and Lottie tired of it.

‘Well, really, Miss Enid,’ she said at last good-humouredly, ‘I can’t see such a great difference between what I did to poor Jack there and the way you fooled Mr. Boyne.’

Enid staggered. ‘There’s all the difference in the world!’ she gasped. ‘I didn’t set out to do it, while you did.’

‘It’s the same to the man, Miss Enid, dear,’ rejoined Lottie, laughing. And Enid, weighing this retort, came to perceive a modicum of truth in it. It opened a new and hateful view of her behaviour.

Shame of the construction others would put upon her recent doings was largely responsible for her answer to her father’s final demand that evening. The old gentleman did

not stay to applaud her resolution but, going straight to the door of the lodge, flung it open and called out :

‘ Boyne !’

Her lover then came in, profoundly abashed, only too thankful for the grace of her hand which he took reverently, as on another occasion this recalled, when they had walked one strange misty afternoon by the sluggish river, and he had helped her on plank-bridges and over stiles.

‘ She shall come up to the house with us this minute ; and we’ll have the wedding as soon as possible. Couldn’t be too soon for you, you young dog—eh ?’

The suitor coloured a little, thinking any degree of boisterousness in bad taste under the circumstances. Enid escaped to don her hat and jacket.

As they were going out, Lottie stood in the kitchen doorway to get a last look at Enid of whose surrender she was aware. Mr. Glover saw her, for she made no move to avoid his gaze. She cared little what became of her, and half hoped that the expansion of his jollity might be great enough to include her also.

But his glance was of grim surprise.

‘ Here, you girl—Charlotte—what’s your name ! I thought you were off the premises. I told you plain enough to be gone. Martha and you, Tom Anthony, kindly see that this person does not come inside the gates after to-night. A faithless servant !’

Something fine and scriptural in this last epithet pleased him. He repeated : ‘ A faithless servant !’

Having heard them drive off, Lottie put on her out-door clothes and walked quickly up the drive towards the Abbey, thinking to crave audience of Mrs. Garland. It was a moonlit night, but, running on the grass in the shadow of the trees, she heard no sound of footsteps drawing near, nor could see anything clearly for tears. The first notice she had that any one stirred abroad beside herself was the small red glow of a pipe at the level of her hair, a strong whiff of tobacco-smoke, and the voice of Lord Elmsdale saying :

‘Softly, whoever you are!—unless you want to bowl over a peer of this realm, which is pretty well sacrilege—hanged if it isn’t!’

Peering close at her, his lordship dropped a soft but copious interjection—

‘Why, you’re crying—just as you were when I found you at the station! Come and tell us all about it. Perhaps I can help somehow, you never know. This way! Slip your arm into mine. There’s a jolly path round here where I often smoke my pipe in the evenings.’ This was not strictly true; in fact he was merely leading her out of the way of Captain Kenneth Stoke who was out somewhere on the drive with Ruth and Mrs. Garland. Stoke was such a bullet-headed idiot he would fail to understand, and the ladies with more acuteness would hardly sympathise.

‘Now tell me all about it. Poor little girl!’

Lottie took his arm and snuggled to it, full of the same reposeful confidence she had before known in his company. Borne along with him in the deep gloom, listening to the tones of his voice—a leonine assumption of the sucking-dove calculated to reassure ladies and enlist their favour—she thought all the while what a dear old silly he was, the sort of man she would choose to care for and keep in order.

So they strayed off happily together into the recesses of the outer woodland, and saw the young moon set among the branches like a brooch entangled in a witch’s hair.

CHAPTER XVI

THE MIND OF HUGH CALDERON

ENID was married in Ditchley church one clear October noon ; and towards evening of the same day Hugh Calderon, returning in meditative mood from a ride with the harriers, pulled up on the crest of the rise above Hedgeham All Saints and gazed across to the more distant village confronting it. He had been bidden to the wedding and had returned thanks for the civility by sending a present to the bride-elect, but preferred any pastime to an appearance there in person.

From that eminence the marshes looked smooth as a lawn ; the poplars shimmered golden beneath a sky, restful as clear water, on which a few white clouds floated like swans. Over against the declining sun Ditchley mill turned shadowy sails as a settled insect stirs its feelers. Among the russet cottages and on the mill slope there was the white flutter of washing hung to dry ; besides which Hugh thought he could descry the flap of real bunting, flags and pennons strung up to adorn the bride's road to church. A little smoke from cottage-chimneys streamed thin and blue down the wind like tresses of a ghost.

The place struck him as strangely unmoved by the day's ceremony, densely callous to an event that would have made angels weep. Only the Union Jack on the church tower, caught in a sunbeam, made a tremulous spot of red on the shadowed hill-side, as if gules had been the one tincture in its blazon ; and a peal of five bells came fitfully with the breeze to vex him by its senseless reiteration.

‘The whole gamut of joy!’ he thought, with a snarl of that dog in the manger which stands for the attitude of every man wholly desirous of a woman.

By recalling Sundays and shedding a spurious peace abroad, the music was particularly obnoxious to his sore spirit yearning to rage and slay. Ever since one o’clock the bells in the flint tower yonder had been rocking and clashing, and the din would go on most likely till after sunset. The ringers had been bribed to rejoice with high fees and no stint of beer. It was all a sham, a vulgar farce, unbearably prolonged, which he cursed from his heart.

At length, with set teeth, he turned his horse’s head and rode back by the way he had come. That his steed should be tired became, in his thirst for whirlwinds, a new aggravation, pinning him down to slow tortures like a fly transfixed by some lover of flies. Deviation of a mile from the straight road, to no other end than that his trouble might be inflamed by sights and sounds sure to prove irritant, had been, he now perceived, the crown of folly.

Till first he looked in Enid’s eyes, the thought of woman in Hugh Calderon’s mind had been a simple maypole, furnishing in a duller age the like sanction and excuse for gamesomeness which a sleek, white Venus gave to roysterers of old. Then all at once, and by a miracle peculiarly disconcerting, the stick had taken life and glorious shape, the symbol had become the thing it shadowed; and revelry was turned to awe and kneeling.

The moment of change was definite as he looked back. At the first glance he had felt drawn to the girl only as he had felt drawn to others since lightly forgotten—an attraction so slight as to be wittingly tentative. He had approached her in the ballroom without palpitation, confident that she would be flattered by his attention—she a schoolgirl, and he a man of renown in the world of fashion. Her snub had stabbed him to the quick, dispelling the drowsy haze of convention so that he had stood for a space confronting her as mere live and natural man to woman.

The flash of his own rare anger, blind to the whole room besides, had photographed her as she stood then in a blaze of scorn. Her fairness dwelt in his brain like the after-thought of a vision.

That same night, when wrath was dead and the picture of her pride and insulting beauty engrossed all his faculties, he had vowed to win her should it cost a life's devotion. He had called at Ditchley Abbey on the morrow with the well-formed design of seeking some explanation of her treatment in all urbanity; but she did not appear and he dared not ask after her, a prey to such bashfulness as he had never before endured. A yearning that was part shamefast coloured existence and warmed it like a blush.

As showers dash the blossom of a plant they refresh, so it is not in the presence of the beloved—brief nervous interviews which have generally a flavour of disappointment—but in the interspace of musing and foreshadowing that love thrives and strengthens apace; such magnifying power is in the mind's eye. Pervaded by new glows and glooms, the hours became for Hugh a shrine which he wrought feverishly to adorn with frescoes wherein memory was iris-winged like hope, and hope borrowed a fair shape from memory; but the haloed shapes faded always ere quite realised, leaving the wall a blank for further brush-play.

With enough of self-command to pursue his wonted avocations so that outsiders saw no change in him, he was yet haunted, a man apart, hugging a sheaf unseen of flowering thorns.

The scandal of Enid's elopement sharpened the irony of his plight which had been trenchant enough before. He, the man most proud of his lineage, most contemptuous of trade and new people, to fawn upon the daughter of a rich draper! But far from quenching his passion, the tidings reinforced it. Recollection had kindled by lonely thought as under a burning-glass; and every word of her, whether good or bad, came now in the nature of fresh fuel—a damper

till the flames took hold, when the fire blazed more fiercely than ever.

Lunching at Ditchley Abbey on occasion of the shooting-party, he had met Sidney Boyne and recognised in him a man he had often found mooning in country-lanes with a pipe in his mouth. A talk afterwards with Lord Elmsdale had taught him all that nobleman could impart concerning Enid's strange recoil and Boyne's desperation. Drawing near the thatched lodge, his lordship had vivified his narration with the image of a hunted thing brought to bay at last after frantic runnings and doublings. The informant, for his part, gave full tongue with the hounds; whereas Calderon, an attentive and silent listener, would have laid down his life for the quarry. Hugh got a glimpse of her face at the lodge-window, and shot badly afterwards.

There was a chance that she would hold out. He imputed to her a strength of will beyond that possessed by most girls of her age. She might embrace the alternative of homelessness which meant hope for him. Given a fair field and no handicap he was prepared to challenge all comers.

The thought of applying to old Glover for leave to compete with Boyne occurred, but he cast it out. A husband was so plainly demanded to cloak the scandal that there would have been indelicacy, almost dishonour, in obtruding at that juncture. He determined to abide the issue of Enid's own inward struggle prayerfully; and even as he was yet fortifying himself in that resolve, official news of her betrothal came and shattered every hope.

But he went to Ditchley church the next Sunday, and during the service his eyes fed on her where she knelt rather sadly beside a cold pillar. It was a new presentment of her, distracting by its suggestion of a common bond of mortality, a human frailty which seemed exquisite in face of the drear old stonework which had outstod generations of lovers. He returned on the following Sunday, with the same care to choose a retired seat in spite of the clerk's anxiety to have him enthroned somewhere.

At that time, and for about a week, he enjoyed comparative calm and believed that, by renouncing the great hope, he had somehow refined on love and distilled from it an elixir to make forlornness sweet. But he was of too active a habit, had been too little used to disappointment for this dreamy phase to be of long duration. As the wedding-day approached, jealousy and the rage of frustration grew rank within him; betrayed in an irritability which his sister Joan, who kept house for him, bore with distress.

His desire for Enid was as robust as ever. The fact of her yielding to another man had not in the least impaired it. She had succumbed; yes, but unwillingly; she had been goaded to it. And besides, at her age, what child was qualified to make her choice from among men, a choice she must abide by till death should intervene. Altogether it was a damnable affair!

Riding home at a foot's pace on the evening in question, he tortured himself with such thoughts until mere weariness brought a change. He was becoming morbid, and to be morbid was un-English. He must pull himself together. That he had sent back the dog-cart which would have borne him home in half an hour, and had dismissed the groom appointed to reconduct his hunter, was proof enough of mental disorder.

At the foot of a hill he got off and walked, leading his jaded steed by the bridle.

His way led over the upland towards Elmondham by a lane that served only a few cottages and two lonely farms, which last stood aloof from the road, each with its dependent stacks and buildings screened in a rookery of great trees. The cackle and lowing of their denizens made music in the distance.

At sundown a cold wind sprang up, flustering the hedges and mingling a wholesome reek of farmyards with the smell of earth and leaves.

About three miles from the market-town, and half that distance from Hugh's own place, there stood a house belong

ing to him, of the dimensions of a large parsonage, with a shady garden and a paddock sloping down to the marshes. It went by the name of the White House and had been built by Hugh's father to oblige a relative who, having retired from the army, wished to reside near him. The place had stood untenanted for two years in spite of the agent's endeavours to let it, every applicant having, upon inspection, declared it either too large or too small for his requirement.

Passing by the drive-gate of this troublesome bit of property, Hugh espied the caretaker coming away from the house down a weed-grown sweep between unkempt laurels and young fir-trees. This person ceased twirling his bunch of keys at sight of the landlord,

‘Well, Bates? What news? Any one been round lately?’

‘Wa yes, sir, and I reckon ta be as good as let. The gentleman from Ditchley Abbey—I can’t mind his name this minute—come in his carriage yester-mornun and Mr. Boyne from Hedgeham along wi’ ’un. They fared wholly pleased wi’ the place, though I took and splained to ’em as that ’d look a sight finer arter that was done up. Ha’n’t yow heerd nawthun, sir? But ’tis likely they ’ll ha’ plied to La’yer Parker.’

Hugh said that he had received no application for the house and, exchanging ‘Good-night’ with his pensioner, walked on at his horse’s head.

Across the dale, which appeared but as a dint in a flat surface, some far-off woods were steeped in an indigo haze which hung on the sky’s blush like the bloom on a ripening plum. Hugh relished the stealthy growth of twilight. His love filled the deepening hush, which sounds afloat in the distance served but to emphasise, and throbbed forth as a thing having life in itself independently of selfish hope and tangible reward.

She was coming, perhaps, to live near him, under his wing.

A young man thoroughly English, proud of the limitations of his nation and class, pious too in the monumental fashion

of us English, which is at once a tribute to our ancestors and a bow to the law of the land, Hugh yet thrilled at the prospect of close neighbourhood with a married woman whom he loved with a passion every habit of thought condemned as impious. The girl was a tradesman's daughter; she had run away with a man, probably the first encountered, thereby incurring the censure and righteous indignation of every one in the county whose judgment Hugh respected. Yet the mere chance of her coming to live so near him was a positive acquisition towards happiness.

Possibilities he chose not to define lurked in the vista thus opened. At the least he would strive to win her friendship and esteem.

CHAPTER XVII

AT HAMFORD HALL

To any one beholding it for the first time the architecture of Hamford Hall gave more of surprise than pleasure; deficient in that native quality which made such houses as Ditchley Abbey, and the gabled farmsteads in its neighbourhood, as natural growths of the landscape. In spite of atoning weather-stains, the structure—something between a Greek temple and the villa of an Italian prince—did not yet look at home in its setting of English woods and meadows. It called for a glass case; the like artificiality being notable in the grounds, of the same period, where arbours were built like votive shrines, the lake had a well-defined stone rim, and statues and urns stuck about on pedestals had often to be cleaned of moss.

To keep the grass-plots smooth required a small army of gardeners, without counting a rosery, a pinery, and other hothouses needing attendance. The hobby of each succeeding squire had added some ornamental fountain of expenditure to house or grounds; for the Calderons had been rich and cultured for generations, and the ravage caused by a spendthrift grandsire had been more than repaired for Hugh by the exploitation, in his father's time, of a tract of property then on the outskirts of London, now the very heart of a populous suburb.

Amid ducal appurtenances young Hugh lived his plain athletic life, as sound as a bell, generous, and with a bias towards the stouter virtues. For him to do evil needed a deal of pondering and self-persuasion; whereas an action of which the inner voice spoke unqualified approval he would

perform in a glow of feeling, spontaneously and thoughtlessly, as a thing in nature.

Joan, his only sister, who filled a higher place in his life than is commonly taken by that relation, deferred to him in all things; not from weakness or a taste for subservience, but partly in acknowledgment of his seniority, his position as head of the family, and partly because she loved him with all her heart. His abstraction of the last few weeks had given her grave concern for his health; and she was hurt by the temper he displayed when she once or twice accused him of hiding some ailment.

On this evening as he entered the drawing-room, she looked up from the book she had opened to beguile the pause before dinner, and smiled to see him cheerful. A bath and change of raiment had braced him since the return from hunting. 'By the bye,' she presently said, taking an open note from off a small table; 'your friend has accepted my invitation to lunch here to-morrow. Here's his letter And—I hope you won't mind—I thought it would be impolite to ignore the Glovers as he's staying with them, so I wrote to Miss Glover as well. I made sure she would refuse as it is so soon after the wedding; you know, the other girl was married to-day. But as it happens, she has accepted for herself and "papa." . . . I should have liked to see the wedding if I could have gone disguised. After that funny party you told me that the girl was very good-looking. Such a pity there was all that talk! . . . Now you're frowning, Hugh; perhaps I should not have asked them; they are appallingly vulgar, aren't they?'

The poise of her head implored him, and her voice had winsome inflections; but Hugh's brow remained stormy. So as not to look at her he took up the book she had laid aside at his entrance, and turned the pages, remarking distantly: 'I don't know what you're talking about. We know people twice as vulgar. I shall be very pleased to see them, and am glad you invited them. What makes you so down on the Glovers this evening?'

There was a trace of suspicion in his way of putting the question, which begat a corresponding misgiving in his listener. Joan was no dullard, and care for her prerogative, as the girl dearest to him, sharpened her perceptions with jealousy. Having treated him to a stare of intense amazement, she fell to arranging the lace at her bosom, saying :—

‘My dear Hugh! Haven’t I heard you say ever so often how shockingly vulgar they were? Remember what a bother Lady Vellum had to persuade you to go to that party; and only the other day you were annoyed at getting an invitation to this wedding, and refused it pretty promptly.’

‘Oh yes, I dare say!—’ said Hugh irritably, as if the remonstrance had been a plague of flies about his head.

The ceremonious opening of both leaves of a door, and the tragic voice of a servitor proclaiming dinner, put an end to the electric silence which ensued between them; and the debate was not reopened, their talk at table hinging on indifferent topics which Joan agitated in a pacific spirit, Hugh with some constraint born of an uneasy feeling that she saw through him. It was this mistrust which made him forbear uttering what it had been in his mind to tell her; as to the likelihood of the Boynes becoming their near neighbours. But the matter was communicated at luncheon on the morrow by Simon Glover, who abounded in praise of his son-in-law.

The meal was served in the smaller dining-room, a perfect cube in shape, which had a window looking on the gardens, and also got light through a door with glass panels leading into a greenhouse full then of chrysanthemums in heavy bud. A fire burning in the cave beneath the sculptured mantelpiece cheered the room with its flicker like a merry thought, relieving the company of the load of a grey sky lowering without. Around the seated guests two serving-men flitted in a respectful orbit.

Ruth Glover sat between Mr. Calderon and Lord Elmsdale. Her father was placed with his back to the window, alone on his side of the table. Being about equi-distant from his

host and hostess, he naturally gravitated towards the lady whom he kept in conversation to the exclusion of Lord Elmsdale who, though he had the refusal of Miss Calderon's other ear, was slow to avail himself of his chances, being customarily abashed by young gentlewomen of culture and refinement.

Ruth's voice rang metallic, and always a little louder than she quite intended, as she rattled on, talking and laughing with Mr. Calderon. Her smile, too, was fixed when silent; a token that she was nervous and burned to please. She was glad to have been set facing the light, sure at all events of a becoming hat and dress, faultless hair, sound teeth, and a good complexion. Comparing herself mentally with Miss Calderon, she would have triumphed had it not been for a quiet grace of dignity Joan possessed, which ennobled her comparative dowdiness and was quite beyond Ruth's compass. A maid with notions, Miss Glover decided, would have turned Joan out a handsome girl. But, as it was, there was nothing fetching about her, nothing whatever to excite rivalry. Only her lofty status in the county and the intrinsic majesty, before cited, saved her from Ruth's pity.

The occasion was a great one in the opinion both of father and daughter. It was at once a long-sought initiation and a perilous ordeal.

Conversation started on the wedding, which Mr. Glover declared had gone off without a hitch. Asked of the bride's countenance, Ruth said that she had been very pale and solemn; but that was Enid on state occasions—always taking things seriously and fancying herself heroical; that was at the heart of all her eccentricities—Ruth gave a rippling laugh—and she had walked out of church side by side with her husband, not taking his arm, which was unusual, to say the least of it. Nor could she be said to have looked her very best, owing to the loss of her accustomed maid, a forward creature papa had been obliged to expel, who had gone off no one knew where. A host of queer people, parents and friends of that Charlotte, had been up

at the Abbey plaguing poor papa with questions. How should he know what had become of the girl? He had dismissed her, and if she had not chosen to go home that was nothing to do with him, now was it?

‘It is really a most mysterious case,’ put in her father magisterially. ‘I have been deeply concerned about it—distressed I may even say. My—ahem!—Mrs. Garland was interested in the girl, who is, I fear, quite lost to her people.’

Lord Elmsdale shook his head solemnly, as who should say ‘D—d mysterious!’ He had been beset with this topic of the missing Charlotte ever since his return to Ditchley two days before, and had repelled the attacks of his sister’s suspicion only by reckless equivocation.

‘You see, Miss Calderon, my son-in-law is a poet,’ said Mr. Glover, reverting to a former argument; ‘and from what I can learn poets are different to other people. I’m no judge of the article myself, but they tell me his poetry is good of its kind. You can’t call it a profession, of course. But it gives the young fellow an object, and now, with the allowance I am making Enid, he can spend time on his hobby without fretting for money. And there’s just a chance he may make something by it. I find from inquiry that some poetry has become valuable property. It’s like stamp-collecting and all the other fads. Why, a friend of mine was telling me the other day of a man who made more than two thousand out of a collection of playbills. There’s money to be got out of almost anything nowadays if you know the ropes. . . .

‘And he’s taken a fancy to this house of your brother’s—tells me he’s had his eye on it for years. Now if I was a young man starting housekeeping on a fairish income, I should settle in some place handier to London. But the lonelier the better for him. It’s queer. But there, he’s a good lad and has more consideration for us old folks than we generally get from the rising generation. He’s the first poet I ever had to do with, and I’ve grown fond of the fellow.’

‘How interesting!’ said Miss Calderon, encouraging

him to proceed. 'And has your daughter also the poetic temperament?'

'That I really don't know; and perhaps she'd be better without it, for they say "two of a trade never agree." To tell the truth'—he hung his head a little—'I haven't seen as much as I ought of her. I've always been a busy man, without the time to do my duty rightly by my girls. I don't know if she's poetical or not; but she was always the one for the country, just the opposite of Ruth there.'

When at length the girls withdrew, leaving the men to masculine confabulations, Lord Elmsdale, who had till then lain very low, rose all at once, as a cork that has been kept by stress under water pops up the moment one removes the pressure. From a practical nonentity he became in a trice a presence, an assertive personality, and took the helm of conversation. Scarcely had the door closed behind the ladies when he turned his chair sideways to the table, crossed legs, and helped himself to wine.

'Now, Glover! You won't get a better chance than this. You may as well out with it!' he said, with a meaning look across at the squire of Ditchley, who appeared ill at ease and glanced apprehensively at a servant still busy at the sideboard.

Hugh stared from one to the other, at a loss to guess what they would be at, and gleaned a wag of the head and a wink from Lord Elmsdale to puzzle him yet the more.

With another glance at the man, whose presence clearly hampered him, old Simon hitched his chair three steps nearer to Hugh.

'The fact is . . .' he began and paused, rubbing his chin. 'The fact is,' took up Lord Elmsdale, 'that our friend here and my sister have taken a fancy to one another, and are going to make a match of it. It's only natural, with so much marriage in the air.'

'That is exactly what I was about to tell you.' Mr. Glover rubbed his hands with a furtive glance at Hugh. 'As you were so kind as to ask my daughter and me here

to-day, I have told you before any one. We intended all along to make the matter public after Enid's wedding; and to-morrow a notice will be sent to the newspapers.'

Hugh held out his hand to the ex-draper who grasped it effusively.

'I congratulate you warmly, sir. May you find all the happiness you deserve!' ('Oh, thank you! Thank you!' murmured Simon, as if all Heaven had been his desert.) 'When is it to be?'

'We hope to have the wedding early in the New Year.' Mr. Glover, genuinely bashful, looked to Lord Elmsdale for countenance. 'Ruth's wedding was fixed for January, but Captain Stoke, whom my friend Elmsdale has sounded, is willing it should take place sooner. We hope to arrange it for an early date in December; but there is still Ruth to reckon with. She has not yet been told, and her temper is —er—certainly difficult.'

Lord Elmsdale looked out at the sky and the still foliage, a monochrome in grey, presently remarking:

'Quite an epidemic, ain't it, old chap? The Abbey'll be getting a name; they'll say the infection hangs there and sulphur or something ought to be burnt in every room. By Gum though, I believe I've got it too. . . . But that's neither here nor there.'

His dreamy tones broke into a joyless laugh.

Hugh seized on the pause which followed to offer more wine and, on their declining, made a move.

On the way to the drawing-room he found occasion to whisper in Lord Elmsdale's ear:

'Garland dead then?'

'As a doornail!' rejoined his lordship in the same tone. 'It was in the papers two years ago. Why dash it, Hughie, you didn't think I'd help my sister commit bigamy?'

When the Glovers took their departure after an early tea, Elmsdale, who had latterly become restless, did not enter the carriage with them, saying he would rather walk if Calderon would go with him a part of the way. His lord-

ship, when in the mood for confidences, craved a friend's ear as some men crave tobacco.

It was a sullen afternoon, threatening rain and wind which yet hung in abeyance. Earth and sky, alike grey, fused on the horizon in a ring of violet haze. The dust on the old turnpike road muffled the noise of hoofs and wheels, and followed vehicles as a cloud. Beyond the flame of the Hamford beeches the road went tapering off between low and dusty hedges, a line of telegraph-posts and wires guiding the eye down the monotonous vista. Smoke from rubbish fires on some allotments fed the gloom.

Lord Elmsdale kept talking earnestly, seeking advice on a point of the gravest importance to his lordship; and Hugh doled out counsel of the best he had, interested now in all troubles of the heart, even where the sufferer was such a reprobate as Ralph.

Elmsdale, creature of impulse, had scented sympathy and felt drawn to Hugh as a dog knows by instinct the hand that will pat him. Nothing would serve his turn but that Calderon should hear the whole story of his latest love, with the sole omission of the fair one's name and address, consider, and give judgment thereon.

Forsaking the dreary highway near the turning to the White House, Hugh led his friend by a footpath down on to the marshes, and showed him a wooden bridge by which cattle crossed the stream.

'That's your way. The path is pretty well trodden on the other side. Make for that gate over there, follow the drift up to the windmill, and then it's plain sailing.'

'But would you marry her if you were me?'

Hugh looked up at some flying rooks. They seemed to grow out of the air, appeared big for one instant with flapping wings, their caw-caw falling distinctly on the ear, then faded again into the grey.

'It would be somewhat risky, wouldn't it?' he rejoined—'if she's so much beneath you. The difference of upbringing would hardly tell for happiness, I should imagine.'

Lord Elmsdale stroked his red chin.

‘Of course she is—confoundedly—beneath me!’ he soliloquised. ‘. . . But hang it, Hughie! I’m so awfully gone on her. And it’d be the honourable thing you know. . . . I tell you, she’s stunning, and a thorough little brick, apart from looks. I’m over head and ears!’

‘Then you must do just what you think right. When a man feels like that he must be his own counsellor.’

‘You’re a thundering good fellow, Hughie—best friend I ever had, by Gad! I always did like you even in the good old days when I had to lick you. What a greedy little swine you were in the fourth form—always gutting: do you remember?’

‘Rather,’ said Hugh, smiling as at the sweetest of memories.

In his way home Hugh passed along the edge of the water-meadows below the White House. Some sheep were in the paddock which adjoined the marshes, tussock-like bulks of the colour of thistledown scattered among dead thistles, munching placidly. They were his sheep and he stopped a long while to stare at them, leaning on the gate. When he turned away the light was grown appreciably more dim, and the curtain westward was torn to rags of violet cloud showing strips of clear carnelian.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE BRIDES

FROM the rooms her father had engaged for the young couple at the hotel where he himself was staying till his marriage on the morrow, Enid could hear the roar of the Strand subject to fits of loudness, as if a door kept opening, when she could make out the rumble of omnibuses and individual cries. Hoots of a tug or steamboat came from the river. The shouts of a newspaper boy rushing down Northumberland Avenue had a mournful intonation, and the incessant patter of footsteps rang dispiriting as a fall of rain.

She sat listening to these sounds in a kind of stupor, with limp hands, and eyes that saw nothing in the room. Sidney had gone out with her father, promising to be back in time to dress for dinner.

The tawny shroud of London had repelled her on arriving. She had left blue skies, clear tints and chiselled outlines to dwell in this land of shadows. The transit symbolised the change from girl to woman. It might be mere lassitude from too much sight-seeing in the immediate past, but at that moment, thinking alone in the great hotel, she saw her life mutilated, her intellect a bird with clipped wings that might leap and struggle but could never fly again. The whirl of new emotions and stultifying changes of scene had so drugged brain and conscience, that this was the first occasion since her wedding-day that she had faced herself with a deliberate question.

She wished she had never put that question.

There came a knock at the door, and she thought it might

be Sidney knocking for fun ; he had playful ways which tired her. But it was a hotel-servant.

‘A lady desires to know if you are disengaged, madam.’ He bore on his tray a card, which she took and said gladly : ‘Kindly show her in here.’

‘How good of you to come and see me ! On this last night too, when you must have such heaps of things to think of !’ Enid drew Mrs. Garland to the sofa and sat down beside her. ‘Papa is radiant. I never saw him looking so well and happy.’

‘I’m glad to hear that. You know it is quite a long time since I saw him last. I have been staying with different friends and relations, and only came up yesterday to my aunt, Lady Bethnal, who is giving the reception to-morrow, and has been making my purchases for me. The dear soul is delighted and so busy. At a cousin’s house in Somersetshire I got three telegrams from her in one afternoon, she was so anxious to arrive at my exact wishes in regard to the material of a certain garment. . . . I half expected to find him here’—she looked round the pompous sitting-room—‘I was charmed with your letter of congratulation. It came the morning after your sister had given us both a piece of her mind. That was terrible, I assure you.’

‘Oh, Ruth ; she’s like that ! She was quite rude to Sidney when we saw her and Kenneth in Paris.’

‘Rather an unpleasant thing happened at her wedding. A young man, who turned out to be Charlotte Heaviland’s brother, insulted your father as he was coming out of church. He might be distressed at his sister’s disappearance ; but to insult a man so clearly innocent ! . . . Happily some of the villagers—his father, I am told among them—had the sense to pull him away. And old Heaviland, a most respectable man, came and apologised next day. Have you had any news of that girl ?’

‘Only one letter about two months ago, which gave no address. It’s in my luggage somewhere. I wonder if I can put my hand on it.’

She went into the bedroom, and came back after a minute with the letter in question, which Mrs. Garland took and scanned judicially.

‘Happy,’ was her verdict. ‘She regrets the break with the old life sentimentally, but is extremely content with the new; or at least was at the time she wrote this. Do you know, Enid?—you’re a matron now, though you don’t look it, and I can talk to you freely—I strongly suspect Elmsdale in this connection.’

‘Lord Elmsdale? Oh, surely never! I never thought him that sort of a man.’

‘Since when have you been a judge of men, my love?’ Mrs. Garland laughed and kissed the young wife’s cheek. ‘He is that sort of man—very much so indeed. And I know he admired her. . . . Don’t look so disgusted, pet. I’m very fond of my brother; and men are quite different to women. They were made, you see, to run after us, and we to shrink and resist. It is curious but true. Ralph has less to occupy him than most men, but otherwise he is no worse than the rest. He will be kind to her, of that you may be sure. He’s too soft-hearted to hurt a fly knowingly.’

Enid said pensively: ‘Don’t you think the cruelty of men to women is most often inflicted unknowingly, just from want of understanding!’

‘What profundity!’ cried Hermia, with a laugh which did not, however, prevent her darting a penetrative glance at Enid. ‘I hope it isn’t the outcome of personal experience. But remember the reverse is also true, of the pin-pricks women are always giving men. Excuse my saying so, but this particular dress becomes you, dear; though you are looking rather pale. Have you a headache?’

‘No. I’m only a little tired of big hotels and first-class carriages, and faring sumptuously every day.’

‘If that’s all, you’ll soon be all right when you get settled in a home of your own and start housekeeping. There’s a delightful nest preparing down at Hamford—“for

the return of our love-birds," as your father said once. Mr. Calderon, the landlord, has been most obliging and is doing more than we dared ask to make the house comfortable.'

'Mr. Calderon!' said Enid, stiffening all of a sudden.

'Now, Enid; surely you're not going to let a bit of childish pique stand in your mind for ever against that poor man! I had forgotten your dislike of him.'

'I was surprised at his name cropping up, that's all. It is rather strange.'

At the moment Mrs. Garland was tearing herself away, Simon Glover and his son-in-law came in. Enid saw her father's face light up as it had never done for her, while the visitor welcomed Sidney back to England. Though his affianced did not even give him her hand, but only sailed past him saying they would meet next day, old Simon was stimulated for the whole evening, called for champagne at dinner, and volleyed nonsense like a schoolboy.

Mrs. Boyne escorting her visitor to the lift, received further kisses with the whisper: 'You can't think how happy I am. I shall get rid at last of this hateful name.'

It was all revelation to Enid, who had imagined the match to be one of pure convenience.

CHAPTER XIX

THE DRAPER'S WEDDING AND OTHER EVENTS CONTINGENT THEREUPON

SIMON GLOVER, his child and son-in-law drove together to the church, closeted in their carriage from the sounds and odour of the town, which looked murky that January day beneath a mist blue-tinted by the wintry sky it hid.

On the road the bridegroom, anxious to cover trepidation with an unbroken crust of small talk, ceased not to babble of trifles. Things of no moment loomed tremendous in their helpfulness as bits of wreckage in the eyes of a drowning man. His was the predicament in which men have been known to importune a waistcoat-button till it fell and crowned confusion.

The likelihood of Aunt Eliza's assistance at the function he debated with feverish zeal. The spinster, his first wife's surviving relative, had rejected his handsome offer of rooms at the hotel; not, as she had taken care to state, that she disliked his marrying again, but that she positively could not spare more than one day from her duties on the committee of a bazaar, being organised to pay off a debt on something belonging to the church she attended. She would try to be at the wedding and at the reception afterwards, but could make no definite promise.

It would give him real pleasure, the bridegroom averred with that nervous rubbing of hands to which he was more than ever subject throughout the drive, to see the good soul once again after all these years.

'But she'll turn up late, if at all, you'll see! She's bound

to miss her way ; old maids always do—eh, Sidney ? And she's not used to London. The noise of the traffic'll stun her. I gave her full directions though ; you'd think she couldn't miss. . . . There's one thing, if she does come, she'll look presentable. Always had good taste in dress, like your dear mother. And I sent her a cheque for expenses, so she ought to come all right. . . . Enid, my love, you look charming—sweet to the tips of your fingers in those pretty gloves'—he patted the hands that lay in her lap beside him. 'Be proud of her, Sidney ! I should like your aunt to see what you've grown to. I wonder if she'll be there.'

Doubts of Aunt Eliza's attendance were dispelled on their alighting at the church-door, about which idlers were beginning to congregate ; for even as Mr. Glover, made agile by excitement, opened the door and sprang out, a modest hansom pulled up behind their carriage, and a lady, silken-clad and young of figure, descended with much decorum. The simple body was almost upset by the rush of her brother-in-law, whom she did not at first recognise. He had given her such a start that effusiveness was all on his side, Enid noticed as, with a finger-tip hold on her husband's arm, she glided into the hush of the church.

There was already a sprinkling of guests in the front pews, and at the back a more numerous gathering of the uninvited, almost entirely feminine, come to criticise the frocks and faces—a chorus, happily inaudible, such weddings seldom lack.

Half-way to the chancel they were met by Lord Elmsdale and Freddy Land, masters of the ceremonies, who ushered them to the foremost pew of all. The latter, in festive attire, his fatuity inflamed with the moment's pride of office, was a most offensive person to Enid. He seemed to expect cordiality, so with a slight curl of the lip she ignored him altogether. The suspicion Hermia had breathed overnight discoloured her view of Lord Elmsdale, so that his jolly face, composed now on lines of prelatic gravity, was as

hateful as Freddy's simper though in another way. How could a man so guilty dare to come to church and, coming, look so obtusely and heartily honest!

Sidney had hardly ensconced himself in the corner next the aisle ere he was asked to move up a little to make room for Aunt Eliza, who came up the church on the bridegroom's arm.

Enid, recalling her own marriage, was thoughtful through the service. She thought the bride, when she arrived, looked extremely nice, and quite youthful. The grey-headed bridegroom showed more than his age beside her.

When she passed out of church at length on Sidney's arm, the straight path to the kerb marked with a strip of red carpet was banked by a considerable crowd—dark forms and white faces, quite accessory and unobtrusive, like things limned on a passage-wall. High over grey roofs the grey mist dispersed in wreaths, showing pools of icy blue. The reflecting pavements had bluish gleams, and the whole scene had acquired luminosity since their entrance. A muffin-man swinging his bell down a side street, which opened out of the square like a chasm in a cliff-face, cried hoarsely at intervals.

Having to wait the turn of their carriage which Freddy officiously undertook to call for them, they saw Aunt Eliza take her seat in a brougham along with Stephen Land who had attached himself to her in the vestry. When the carriage came at length young Land claimed to enter with them as a reward of his pains in fetching it. His father had gone off without him; unless they took pity, he would be packed in a stuffy cab with strangers or have to walk. Sidney acceding as a matter of course, Enid had to resign herself for a space to his crude compliments and reminiscences of 'good times' he pretended to have had with her, veiling her displeasure with an appearance of some fatigue.

The reception at the Dowager Lady Bethnal's house in Park Lane suffered much in conviviality from a sensible though polite tendency the sheep had to sniff at the goats, the

bride's party at the bridegroom's. Despite all the hostess could do, and she wrought hard for fusion, the division remained uncomfortably marked, though Lord Elmsdale sided frankly with the plebeian faction and one or two male patricians talked to Enid.

The Dowager Marchioness seemed to have taken a fancy to Mrs. Boyne, for she kept returning from hospitable tours among the guests, and took a caressing tone to chat with her.

Enid kept nearly stationary, letting people take turns in talking to her, amused with the variety of remarks she heard. Only once did she bestir herself, and that was when Aunt Eliza came sidling through the press with 'My dear, I have not yet been presented to your husband. I was unhappily prevented from being at your wedding as I should have liked; for I was present at your christening and your confirmation. I'm sure he must be nice. I should like to know him.'

Then she moved in search of Sidney, whom she found talking to Freddy Land in the vestibule and brought back to her aunt.

Uncle Steve came and called her a little sinner, asking her why she had not confided in him when she wished to run away. The idea of her running seemed to tickle him hugely. He had, he said, been teasing Boyne by reminding him of the same misdemeanour.

'Well, so long as you're happy I forgive you, you puss!' he concluded in a benedictory way. Whereupon she hung her head a little and he flipped her cheek, smiling at her bashfulness.

At length the whole assembly swarmed down into the entrance hall to form a lane on the passage of the wedded pair. Amid a storm of farewells, of kisses and shaking of hands, the bride cried 'Where's Enid?' and after peering to right and left she took her stepdaughter in her arms and kissed her on both cheeks, with care, however, to avoid collision of the spreading hats both wore.

'Who is she?' Enid heard people asking; and some one said 'Old Glover's daughter, married to a man named Boyne.' This while a galling fire of rice and confetti, secretly distributed by Lord Elmsdale and his creatures, opened on the couple as they crossed the threshold and walked down the steps to the carriage. Beyond the park-railings, up in the streaming smoke-mist which dimmed the trees, the dove of sunset hovered ruby-breasted with spread wings of shining gold. Its glow was on the faces crowding to the door.

'You'll come and see me, dear, won't you?—whenever you're in town!' said Lady Bethnal, patting Enid's cheek when she took leave. 'I have heard so much of you from Hermia.'

And then Sidney went to fetch his hat and overcoat, while she and Aunt Eliza drifted out on to the pavement, where he presently joined them at the carriage-door. The aunt was looking about for a cab.

'Oh no; let us drive you!' said Enid.

Sidney bit his lip and looked despairingly at his wife.

'What, all the way to Euston, love? It is so far out of your way.'

'Not a bit of it! I shall enjoy the drive, and I've had no chance of talking to you in that crowd.'

Sidney scowled villainously behind the spinster's back, as he helped her in; but he managed to dissimulate his disgust, and his brow was smooth as he shut the door on the pair of them, saying:

'I think I'll go straight back. There are some letters I ought to write before dinner. I'll walk down to Hyde Park corner and take a cab from there.'

'All right, dear,' said Enid suavely. 'Only tell the man where to drive. Euston station, please!'

'Now I have put Mr. Boyne to inconvenience, I know I have, and I shall never forgive myself—never!' said Aunt Eliza as they were borne along. And she kept thrumming on the same string of lamentation, though Enid assured her

there was no such call for self-reproach. However, her self-accusation grew less poignant as the soothing motion of the carriage, the softness of the cushions, and the unwonted luxury of such going took effect. When the door was opened at Euston and she stepped forth into the hurly-burly, there was no room in her heart for aught save pride at being seen to get out of so fine an equipage. She was delighted too with the little hush of admiration her niece's elegance shed on the groups in the booking-office and on the platform.

Enid stood talking at the door of the compartment until the final whistle; and it pleased the spinster that travelling companions should see her kissed and made much of, and hear her called auntie by so grand a lady. The good soul's head ached on the journey as she reviewed the glories of the day and strove to recall the exact appearance of all the titled people who had been pointed out to her.

As Enid was driven back in lonely state to the hotel, twilight lost its rich suffusion of violet and kept fading, till all that remained was a scarce-seen veil of dead lilac colour hanging somewhere between the bright lamps and the dim sky. She had schemed for that half-hour's solitude.

Contrary to her expectation, Sidney had recovered temper, and there was no need for the farce of coaxing which her soul abhorred.

'How cruel, how tantalising of my sweet to go and bring in the terrible aunt when I was pining for a *tête-à-tête*, as she might have guessed I should be after all that humbug of society! . . . Everybody admired you; I was so proud. . . . But there will soon be an end to distractions. Only the visit to the Vellums and that one to your father's partner, old Land. But perhaps we can wriggle out of that somehow; it will be a bore, though I found the son a nice fellow, easy to get on with. . . . Then we shall be at home—our own home! And I shall set to work, and you will be my constant inspiration, my Muse and my public too. Think of

the happiness. Just our two selves, and the world shut out !'

He drew her head down on his shoulder as he spoke ; and she submitted, knowing what reproaches any show of disinclination would infallibly wring from him, and quite powerless to tell him how the prospect in his words dismayed her.

On the morrow she was in her bedroom after breakfast, putting on her hat and furs preparatory to a shopping excursion with Sidney, when a note was brought to her by the chambermaid.

'MY OWN DEAR MISS ENID,

'I do so long to speak to you. I will be on the Embankment all this morning, close to Cleopatra's needle, in case you should come alone and meet me, and this afternoon from two till four I will be at the same place if you don't come this morning. Do please try ! You are looking pale, dear, I noticed yesterday, when I saw you—never mind where !

'I do hope you are quite—quite happy as is

'Your faithful

'LOTTIE.'

Enid's impulse was to hie at once to the river-side ; but recollecting her engagement to go with Sidney to Bond Street, she stifled her impatience till after luncheon when, Sidney being lazy with no other thought than to smoke, it was possible for her to slip out for an hour without being missed.

Though the sun shone palely, it was a day of gloom. White gleams upon the river, along the dark coping of the Embankment wall, and from a few windows in the great buildings like Arguses watchful of the Surrey shore, no more affected the besetting grey than the shine of a nigger's teeth affects his skin's blackness. The obelisk when she neared it appeared as one piece with the lions at its base, with the long parapet and the dingy pavement. Sparrows were

plentiful, and a few screaming sea-gulls circled over the water.

‘My dear Miss Enid!’

She had felt no recognition of the fashionably-dressed woman rather closely veiled; but now the veil was pushed up, leaving no doubt of her identity.

‘Lottie, come back with me! I need a maid, I do really. And what you’ve done makes no difference; it ought to, I suppose, but it doesn’t—it shan’t, believe me! Come back, dear, and it shall be as if nothing had happened.’

‘What, go back to service!’

The exclamation was neither scornful nor contentious; only extreme amazement opened the speaker’s blue eyes, and her pretty mouth gaped a little.

‘Yes, Lottie. You think I don’t mean it; but I do really! Nobody shall reproach you. You’ll be able to start quite afresh.’

‘But, my dear, I’m so happy as I am.’

It was Enid’s turn to look astonished. Lottie’s eyes sparkled as she cast them down, saying with a pout and some nervous play of the hands.

‘I may be married for all you know, Miss.’

‘If I could only be sure you were!’ returned Enid so fervently that a hot flush coloured Lottie’s face and neck. ‘You would hardly, I think, have made such a secret of our meeting here had that been the case.’

‘Well, and if I’m not,’ began the other combatively; ‘does it really make such a lot of difference? My dear Miss Enid, it’s love and not the marriage service makes things right. The service is like a blessing on the love, as I look at it; and where there’s no love the parson’s words won’t bring it; they’re just a mockery.’

‘And you love Lord Elmsdale!’ said Enid stingingly, goaded to swift reprisals by the stab those truisms gave her.

Lottie started and reddened; a wave of anger gave her fleeting majesty.

‘Who told you it was him? Never say that to any one! He has been very kind . . . a true friend . . . and he . . . but I . . .’ There was a space of confused murmuring, ‘And I beg of you, Miss, not to mention to any one that you’ve seen me.’

The parting was a little chill on both sides, a cause of regret to Enid as she walked back to the hotel. She would have shown herself more lenient but for the smart of that platitude anent loveless marriage coming like a slap in the face to enrage her.

CHAPTER XX

AT THE WHITE HOUSE, HAMFORD

THE instinctive antagonism which Hugh Calderon had always roused in Enid attained a sturdier growth when residence at Hamford White House exposed her daily to his civilities. She thought his protective attitude and grave solicitude for her comfort in the last degree uncalled for.

At the very moment of their arrival he must needs intrude on her numberless preoccupations by a letter, which Sidney found awaiting them and brought to her where she stood in the doorway superintending the portering of their boxes. Westward across the lawn, violet rain-clouds, uplifted like an arras, revealed a panel, burnished brass in colour, which shone through the leafless screen of trees as through a filigree of rusted bronze. By the dying torch of sunset she read the following :

‘DEAR MR. BOYNE,

‘Mr. Glover asked me some time ago to find a man to keep your garden in order, and also a lad to help him and do odd jobs—subject, of course, to your approval when you arrived. The man has now been at work a month. He was employed at the White House in my cousin’s time, and I can vouch for his trustworthiness and competence. You will find him something of an oddity, but thoroughly reliable as a servant.

‘About the boy I have had more difficulty, not for lack of applicants, but there is no one whom of personal knowledge I can recommend. However, I have let some respectable

labouring people know your requirement, and hope you may be able to suit yourselves from among those who will apply for the place.

‘I was given to understand that you have a coachman in view; or I could easily have found you one. If I can be of any further use, please let me know, and oblige

‘Yours sincerely,

‘HUGH CALDERON.’

‘How very kind of him!’ said Enid. ‘But have you “a coachman in view”? I thought you had left everything to papa—to Mr. Calderon, as it seems.’

‘Have you forgotten Miles, dear?’ he asked playfully, with the quasi-religious expression his face would assume on any allusion to their elopement. That long-repented piece of insanity still shone for him as a miracle of mercy; and all who had anyhow participated therein he honoured with a devotional remembrance like that accorded by the Church to minor characters of Scripture. ‘He played a large part in our love-story and lost a good place for helping us. Surely you wouldn’t have him left out now it has come to “They lived happy ever after.” I kept it as a little surprise for you.’

Enid gnawed her underlip. But the vexation caused by this engagement, without consulting her, of a servant proved untrustworthy, was dwarfed to insignificance by the mortification she felt at being inducted into her new home by the august Mr. Calderon; at having her household arranged for her through his condescension, at entering on a new phase of existence under his auspices. She had seen so little of the person, and that little had borne such bitter fruit, that her abhorrence of him was rather as a sinister influence than as a man.

His vicinity, and the protective wing he made a virtue of extending over them, discontented her from the first with her new abode, disheartening her at the very outset in a brave resolve she had formed to overcome her repugnance

to seclusion with Sidney and devote all her energies to his comfort.

Why his mere neighbourhood should have this disastrous effect she could not herself conjecture, unless it might be that every slight disturbance set her against Sidney, whose only chance lay in keeping her placid, and blunting her wits with the monotony of a cow-like existence.

She had come prepared to accept her home with all its limitations; and they were black and narrow to a girl, not yet twenty, who had but peeped at the world's good cheer. By nature she was venturesome and curious, avid of free movement, impatient of calm and restraint. It was no slight sacrifice that she had schooled herself to endure; amounting as it did to the renouncement of all activity.

Still, on the other hand, she was tired for the moment. A period of quiet seemed desirable after the senseless progress through Europe, and more recently among friends and relatives. Amid the hail of acclamations and felicitations enough to have swamped felicity had she known any to speak of, she had felt like a captive gracing the car of a victor, contributing to a triumph which blazed her own shame.

One who had vanquished her in the fair fight of civilised man with civilised woman, without favour or assistance, she could have followed to the world's end gladly. The idea of such an one had come to dwell with her of late. But Sidney had won her unfairly. After definite rejection he had applied to her father; repulsed in the field he had run whining for the constable. Constraint had been put upon her. She could never forgive him that meanness. She had then accepted him as a consort, not fully awake to the vastness of the surrender; never would she accept him as a sovereign. She intended gently to let him know that, while attending to his comfort as a wife should.

She had meant to do her duty by him, if not with gladness, at any rate with alacrity. And here sprang up a new source of irritation, impossible to explain to Sidney

as it was far from lucid to herself, but which subtly precluded her setting herself to please him whole-heartedly as she had intended.

Just as every one in Windsor is proud to gossip of royalty, so talk was preferably of the Calderons in this their home parish of Hamford.

From the field-path to the church, which, from its privacy, was a favourite walk of Enid's, the grey face of the Hall could be seen staring down a glade between ancient trees. And the church itself stood within the park fence, and was so full of florid memorials of 'the family' as almost to destroy its usefulness for worshippers not of that blood.

If she entered a shop in Elmondham and desired her purchases to be sent to the White House, Hamford, the tradesman would say, with that soapy wringing of hands to which she was always treated: 'We have an order to deliver at the Hall, madam,' or 'Our cart goes to Hamford every day, to Mr. Calderon's.' And the remark would be followed up by fulsome eulogy of the great family to which Elmondham, hardly less than Hamford, held itself tributary.

That one man, whom she personally disliked, should so engross the attention of a whole district that it was well-nigh impossible to avoid reference to him in conversation, to avoid thinking of him in even lonely walks, disgusted her to the point of tempering her enjoyment of pleasures no one man can arrogate—the spring-tide freshness, the song of skylarks, and the growth of summer from rosy bud to leaf and flower.

Visiting among the cottagers, she was disappointed, although she professed herself glad, to hear Squire Calderon everywhere extolled as kindest of hearts and best of landlords. If anything went wrong it was attributed to Mr. Parker, the agent, who, however, was not unpopular, for very little ever did go wrong on the estate. For some subtle reason, the assurance she everywhere got of his

perfections only made her mind more vigorous to detract from them.

Miss Calderon called on her, and Enid returned the visit. She was extremely kind, but Mrs. Boyne detected a constraint beneath her kindness which she read as the instinctive shudder of blue blood at the approach of the coarser red. But for that she would have felt rather attracted.

During the summer, the Boynes were bidden to every festivity at the Hall, whether public or private, and Sidney insisted on his wife going there, though left to herself she would have found excuses.

Enid could find no fault with Mr. Calderon's behaviour; she was forced to concede him the grace of good manners. Sidney was lumpish beside him. But the fact that he dwarfed her husband did not count in his favour. She wished to think better, not worse, of Sidney. Any person or circumstance tending to worsen the light in which she saw him, came in for a share of the rage she felt on any sharp reminder of her fetters.

Sidney's caresses, which she had never desired, now that the wilderment of their novelty was gone, had become downright repulsive to her. But failure to respond to word or look brought on a more grievous persecution by reproach and wailing. What with complaints and kisses, home grew hideous. She sought relief in lonely walks whenever she could slip out unrebuked. And these evasions furnished the theme for further threnody, till she could see herself as he painted her, heartless, cold, inhuman, a woman of marble at whose feet he must sob out his life.

Worst torment of all, marriage, with its revelation of the nude first purpose underlying all the drapery of human life, had caused her to be haunted with a presence scarce discerned in her maiden imaginings. This was the perfect helpmate, the one whose embrace would be no pollution. This ghost walked ever between her and her husband. It seemed the personified essence of her growing repugnance

to Sidney's weak-kneed infatuation; and though in the house its presence saddened her, she loved to be alone with it out of doors. There it lost outline, became blent with all nature, purifying, protecting, comforting.

Enid longed for Hermia's coming that she might confide in her. But Ditchley Abbey was given over to a horde of plumbers and decorators pending the return of its owner, who was still travelling with his bride.

After Miss Calderon's visit, the gravel sweep up to the house bore every day fresh marks of carriage-wheels. Sidney examined each fresh deposit of cards with an interest Enid could not appreciate. He was now the conventional one, she the rebel against social pretences; a change somewhat disconcerting, since the only regard she had ever paid him had been on account of his disillusionment with the so-called elegances.

Besides the great ladies of the district, whose bearing marked a certain condescension, there was another layer of callers, wives of doctors and lawyers from Elmondham, of clergymen from the adjoining parishes, all ready to have sphered Enid in warmth of flattery had she at all responded to their overtures. She did not feel drawn to any of them.

Once she walked over to Ditchley and called on Lottie's mother. The painfulness of the interview was increased to the verge of disgust by the woman's philosophic attitude towards her daughter's fault.

'Tis the Lord's will, mum, I reckon; though that be a master-pity and no mistake. But we all has our bardens to bear, which is give us, mum, for our 'tarnal good. Only'—her voice grew a tone more strident—'the hussy needn't think as she can come back home whenever her fancy man tire o' keepin' of her. I'll look to that, mum, though her father, poor man, dew fare that soft he'd take her in, and boy Chris be wellnigh crazed to get her home again.'

It was washing-day at the cottage. Enid's dislike of the warm, faint reek of soapsuds combined with the woman's

restlessness to curtail her visit. Mrs. Heaviland seemed to think the immediate rinsing-out of soaked garments of more consequence than a misfortune six months old, to which she had grown accustomed; and which, being from the hand of the Lord, it lay beyond her power to mend or mitigate.

Sidney scolded her when she reached home. He hated her walking, could not understand her neglect of the carriage. She had once said that she would like a saddle-horse, but he had brought specious reasons against the suggestion. He would not countenance a pastime in which he could not join with comfort; and he was no rider.

Constitutionally timid with horses, he seldom went out with Enid in the dog-cart, not liking to be seen sitting idle while his wife drove. So sensitive was he on this point that he would change places with her when they approached a village and hold the reins for a time, resigning them again ostentatiously, that any one looking might think he yielded to a whim of hers.

She preferred a walk to any other mode of exercise for its allowance of solitude; Sidney with the change of circumstances having quite renounced the habit.

CHAPTER XXI

HUGH CALDERON AGAIN OBTRUDES HIMSELF

TEMPTED by a fine afternoon, Enid rambled to Ditchley with a view to tea at the thatched lodge. She had been there twice since settling at Hamford, and had each time striven to reason Martha out of her absurd condemnation of Mr. Glover's second marriage.

On this occasion she found the lodge in the condition of a hive disturbed, Martha buzzing constantly in and out, while old Thomas hovered at a wider radius, keeping restless watch on the road. He ran to give warning of her approach. Even from a distance it was clear that her coming only interrupted the look-out for some one else.

'It's the van, my dear,' Martha explained in response to Enid's amazed glance at some pieces of furniture swaddled in bast standing among the flower-beds. All the garden was littered with straw and bits of paper, which a breeze kept lifting. 'It was to have been here at three o'clock punctual—the good-for-nothink took his Bible oath. And 'ere it's gettin' on for five and no one been.'

'A quarter past four,' said old Anthony, consulting a great watch which bulged his waistcoat pocket and had to be coaxed forth.

'You don't mean to say you're leaving!' Enid cried.

'Indeed we are, Miss. Didn't I tell you when you was here a month ago? Only we 'adn't then found no 'ouse convenient. But now we've found one miles off—at Easterwick, by the seaside. Tom went a jaunt there a month back, and was that took with a cottage he saw,

that he'd give me no peace till I'd been and looked at it.'

'There's a tidy bit o' garden,' threw in Thomas, nearly weeping.

'There's a nice front bedroom and a sittin'-room what we can let for lodgin's in the summer-time,' said Martha, wiping her eyes.

Enid took a scolding tone.

'I remember now you did say something about moving. But I never gave it a thought. It was too ridiculous. I never dreamt you could really mean it. I think you're both very silly and ought to know better!'

At that the pair of them began to blubber.

'Oh, my own dear Miss Enid, you wouldn't 'ave me bow down afore the likes of 'er what was such a henemy to me and Tom.' 'There's sad changes. We ain't wanted, stands to reason. But the master've wrote very kind to Martha, and he's goin' to give us more money—'tain't the money, Miss Enid dear—and 'ope we'll be 'appy where we're goin'. But—oo—oo—'tain't 'appiness we look to find.' 'Me what've known and loved your dear mother, and 'aven't forgot 'er yet, sweet angel! Like some which ought to 'ave minded her more than any.'

The whole scene—a mummified chest of drawers, some chairs and a table lying out in the garden in a rippled pool of sunshine among bright flowers, with the woods murmuring all about them, and the weeping couple in the foreground—was most painful to Enid. She could have rated the pair soundly for their imbecility; but as well blame a child for childishness.

'What rubbish!' she was beginning, when Thomas called out, 'Ere it come!' and a yellow pantechnicon van came into sight, lumbering through the leafy tunnel, its great body jolting through hoops of light and shade.

It was past tea-time; Sidney would be getting anxious. Instead of going back by the road, Enid decided to try and strike a path across the marshes of which she had heard.

By the advice of a carter she turned down a drift, or lane, beside Ditchley windmill, assured that at its end she would find a gate admitting to the open meads.

The drift was long and winding, with grass-grown ruts and high hedges, into which five-barred gates were let at wide intervals, giving glimpses of divers fields in some of which wheat was yellowing.

To her confusion, on surmounting a rise, she came face to face with Mr. Calderon on horseback. His presence seemed a barrier from hedge to hedge. Conscious of colouring hotly, she was furious to think he might ascribe her blush to some origin other than pure annoyance.

He sprang down off his horse, and raised his straw hat to her.

‘Good evening, Mrs. Boyne. . . . Do you mind my walking back with you as far as the meadows?’

Nothing could be more trivial than the request as he put it. But Enid, detesting him as she did, said :

‘Oh, thank you very much. I really like being alone.’ And with the nod of politeness walked on rather haughtily. The lane sank, and rose on another wave of the land, from the height of which she beheld the drift’s-end in a gate and stile beneath a spreading ash-tree.

Half-running down the slope, as she neared the gate she was dismayed and brought to a standstill by something rising slowly out of the rank herbage beside it. A man’s bloated face in which freckles were bedded like the grains in a ripe strawberry, glowered at her above a heap of rags. There could be no doubt of its menace, as the eyes peered this way and that to make sure that the coast was clear. It would be cowardly, she felt, to turn back ; and besides, instinct bade her watch an appearance so threatening.

If he offered rudeness she would fling her purse in his face, or cry out and strike him, she did not quite know which.

The tramp stood up now, and, resting an arm on the gate, watched her advance. She stepped on, trying to cow the beast beforehand with a steady, contemptuous gaze.

All at once the bear turned lamb, opened the gate for her and cringed with 'Good-evenin', lady,' as she passed through. She knew that Mr. Calderon must have followed her, but would not look back.

Presently, as she hurried on across a green level from which hay had but the day before been carted, she heard his voice behind her :

'Mrs. Boyne, please excuse me!'

She faced about, very angry that he should hound her so. It was mean to follow up a real kindness by an immediate claim for thanks, and she had a mind to tell him of it. But his first word disarmed her.

'I came to tell you this is not the path. If you were to follow this out it would take you into the thoroughfare at Elmondham through Love Lane and the White Lion yard. Let me put you once for all in the right path, and I won't trouble you any more. I must beg your pardon, as it is; for you said you wished to be alone, and for aught I know you may be wanting to go to Elmondham.'

Finding no word, she retraced her steps: and he walked beside her, leading his horse. He treated her like a naughty child; and she deserved it—there was the sting. Though she did not meet his eyes she could feel their admiration, and thought of cutting her white serge walking-dress to little pieces when she got home, simply because he liked her in it.

The July evening bathed the land in soft rich hues. Shouts of haymakers came from a meadow nearer Ditchley where a wagon, piled high with the crop, moved dark across the glow among shadowy haycocks looking like ant-heaps.

She was obliged to grant him her hand at parting, and to falter something by way of thanks, which he cut short with a very blunt farewell. In addition to everything else, he was rude, she thought.

CHAPTER XXII

THE RESUSCITATION OF A VILLAIN, TRADITIONAL IN MELODRAMA

DURING the last week of July, Elmondham, from a stagnant little market-town, became a gay capital to which the entire countryside looked with excitement or longing. A tennis-tournament, a cricket-match, a flower-show and a horse-show were crowded in that week, which closed noisily with the Lammas fair as with a blast of trumpets.

For days before the gala, gipsy carts and caravans of a dingy gaudiness were to be met crawling on the main roads; and the life in these moving homes had singular fascinations for the clean, fat village youngsters who stood to stare at the shaggy urchins trotting along beside the wheels, much as Roman children may have watched the horde of Attila ere the fear got loose. More than once, Enid, emerging from the village shop and post-office, saw one of these arks in motion, smoking from its funnel, and the sloven tribe escorting it, along with a meagre suggestion of flocks and herds.

The chosen halting-place of the aliens was a field beside the Hamford road, which a farmer was pleased to let for the purpose now that his hay was clean mown and carted. They pitched there on the upland, in sight of the promised land. After sundown on Lammas Eve, the open spaces of the town were at their disposal when once a small fee had been paid to the authorities.

Rain falling about four o'clock on the day of the horse-show, a number of people who had come unprovided with umbrellas left the field, though the trials were far from

over, and a brass band continued booming away without much spirit.

As Christmas Heaviland and a chance acquaintance, of aspect sporting but shabby, passed behind the stand in their way out, fine ladies and their attendant squires were dribbling forth; capes were being adjusted, cloaks thrown over gauzy dresses. An elderly gentleman, fussing after a very stately dame, exclaimed just ahead of them:

'Where's James with the wraps? I wonder where that James has got to! Bennet was so particular to put them in; he was sure it would rain, going by the glass. You heard me tell James we should leave early, and to mind and bring them. It is abominably careless of him. You may catch your death.'

The lady thus beset, who walked in close confabulation with a well-dressed, graceful girl, turned a smiling face to allay her squire's anxiety.

'Oh, Simon dear, don't worry so! Sidney has gone for Enid's cape, and is going to stir up James at the same time. We can go into one of the tents till he comes back. Happily it hasn't been raining long enough to wet the grass——'

'Steady on here! . . . I say, hew be yow a-luggin' of?' said Christmas, aghast at finding himself dragged back a dozen paces.

'Beg your pardon, I'm sure,' said his companion with an odd laugh. 'But I'm that nervous you'd hardly believe. I somehow thought I knew the lady, and that took me aback. Who is she, d'you 'appen to know?'

'Mother Glover o' Ditchley Abbey, if it's the old un yow mean.'

'Fie now!' said the vagabond playfully, holding up a finger of admonishment, 'to speak so disrespectful!'

The younger man with a fatuous chuckle went on:

'She be newly married to old Glover. Afore that she were a widder-woman name o' Garland—The Honourable Mrs. Garland, that's how they called her.'

‘Oh, I thought that’d be her name,’ said the other, deeply pondering. ‘Thought I couldn’t be mistaken. Glad I nipped out o’ the way though! It wouldn’t ’ve suited my little book for ’er to ’ve spotted me. There ain’t no love lost between us owin’ to something which happened when I lived groom at her father’s.’

‘Oh; it was like that, was it?’ observed Christmas in a comprehensive way.

They passed out of the enclosure beneath a string of sopping flags. Improvident maids and matrons were scurrying back into the town, with a display of light petticoats and padding feet, with scolding and forced laughter, shepherded by anxious swains. The church bells pealing through the wet haze rang as hope against hope, a vain striving after jollity.

Many shops in the thoroughfare were shut, and every inn-bar emitted a hum as of bees which deepened to a roar whenever one entered or came out.

Christmas and the ex-groom turned in beneath the first signboard.

‘That lady now as yow fared kind o’ skeered on,’ began the former, after clearing his throat with a draught from the tankard served to him.

‘Ah?’ said the other quickly, looking sharp out over his pewter-pot which he lowered slowly.

The hum of the crowded bar drowned their words for others and allowed of confidences. The dimness within the tavern was stagnant and had a beery suffusion, grateful to eyes tired of the rain-light. Its reek of beer, too, appealed to wayfaring men like a whiff of the stable to a jaded horse.

‘Well, I don’t mind tellin’ ye, ’twas all along o’ them Glovers as I came to get so sour-like agen the nobs. My sister lived lady’s-maid at the Abbey a year, and then one o’ the fine sparks what come down for the shootin’ marn ha’ got round her, for last September she cleared out and were no more seen. I take that to heart I tell ye, for I were

main fond o' gel Lottie. I ha' 'plied to the old gen'l'm'n and to that there lady-'quaintance o' yourn, what was the governess at the time, only wishin' to come somehows right nigh to the man what ha' got my sister; and I ha' been used as if I were o' no more count than this here old mug.'

'The governess, was she?'

'No, I tell ye, she were lady's-maid. T'other un were governess.'

'To be sure. . . . Ah, that's the way with gals: you must keep a line on 'em. But I'm surprised at you takin' on so.'

'Ah, there's a many laugh at the way I fare vexed. I'm proud, I am, and that kind o' hut me. I'd gie a lot to know the chap's name.'

'What, 'aven't you got an idea who it is?'

'I tell ye, no, warse luck!'

The horsey man tightened his lips and rounded his eyes to express consternation and sympathy.

'Did her brother ever visit there?' he inquired at length meaningly.

'What d' ye say? Me—o' course not.'

'Nah—nah! I was thinkin' of her we were talkin' about—Mrs. Glover, didn't you call her? Viscount Elmsdale her brother is now. He was the Honourable Ralph Thaneson when I knew him.'

'Oh, ah! He come and stay there.'

The horsey man laughed. 'Then it's my opinion you don't want to look far.'

'What's that?'

'He was always the boy for a pretty girl.'

'Yow don't mean that?'

'I do.'

The ex-groom returned young Heaviland's eager glance with impassivity, going on to say:

'But he'd be a queer one to tackle would his lordship. He was always a bit of a bruiser, and he ain't proud

that way. I've known him work a fair change in faces. . . . There was one drayman in partickler——'

'Well, let's have another!' said Christmas, rapping his pewter mug on the counter with the impatience of one who has heard enough. 'Fancy us meetin' accidental like this.'

'Old Glover rich?' asked the horsey one presently.

'Warth millions o' money.'

'I see.'

On parting from this chance acquaintance whose talk had proved so unexpectedly interesting, Chris Heaviland remembered an offer, made earlier in the day, of a lift home in the cart of his kinsman, George Adolphus, who had also come to see the horse-show. The appointment had been for six o'clock at his house of call, the Ferry Inn down by the station. As Christmas slouched down Station Road there came a roar, a sudden burst of sound, and a train rushed across the street-end, hiding the river for a moment, its locomotive with shut-off steam slowing to the station. In those parts trains are used to tell the time by; Chris knew that he was late at the rendezvous. But inquiring of a stable-boy who stood yawning at the gate of the inn-yard, he learnt that his kinsman had not yet left the private bar, where he found him one of a conclave of stolid toppers who sat there in a tempered gloom like forgotten deities.

'Wa, Chris bo!'—'Wa, uncle!'—'I been waitin' for yow.' George Adolphus clasped his nephew's hand without rising from the settle where he occupied the corner seat next the bar. He was sipping rum and water. A dusty billycock with one or two dints in it, set on the back of his head, detracted somewhat from the impressiveness of grey breeches and buskins, grey coat, and a vast waistcoat of many colours festooned with watch-chain.

Every seat being occupied, and no one of the Olympians inclined to move, Chris took his drink at the counter, observed dispassionately of the whole assembly.

'I fell in with a man what had lived groom with the

fam'ly o' Mrs. Glover o' the Abbey, as now is. He's now partner with his brother-in-law in a shooting-gallery and cokernut shies. His missis dew the business by what he said; he and his mate just loaf. They're here for the fair. That's what kep' me.'

'Ah!' said George Adolphus, setting down his glass and licking his lips with the gusto of a giant refreshed. 'I mind the lady. One mornun—'Twere last autumn seed-time, and all along o' your sister—I vexed th' old dear good tidily; but there weren't no wards like what I'd ha' got from some as calls 'emselves ladies. That kind o' shamed me, that did.'

'Ah, Georgie bo'!' thrust in a smug and smiling neighbour who had been restlessly waiting his opportunity. It was as when a kettle that has been long a-simmering suddenly boils over, drawing the eyes of a roomful of people till then oblivious of its presence. 'Ah, Georgie bo'! And dew yow reckerlect ta night afore that, when we was all gaythered together sociable-like in your bar—'Twas the night your niece come unexpected—dew yow mind ta chap from Barnham what set and drank and couldn't see us when he looked on us, nor yet hear us when we spoke tew un. That were the rummest job I ever see. There be'an't a many what seen that as'll ever forget the sight.'

The jaunty man looked solemnly round on the company before re-setting his pipe.

'Dew yow hold your tongue, Arny!' said George Heaviland, with severity. 'Hew axed yow to speak? I mind the man as well as yow, bo', as 'tis but nat'ral I should, seein' as 'twere me what took ta hosses out and dragged t' old wain up ta yard.'

'Come now, George! I helped ye wi' that job, and so did Ned and old Solomon. You couldn't ha' done it all yerself, I defy ye!—'tain't to be expected as ye could. 'Twas me what let down the shafts.'

George Adolphus deigned no further discussion. He rose with a yawn.

‘Well, ’tis time we was a-startin’! I never been so late afore. Now, Army, get yow up, bo’! Come along together! Wa, ’tis night!’

The yard of the Ferry Inn was a space circumscribed by the Inn itself, from which the stables branched at right angles, and the railway, from which it was divided by a boundary wall but little lower than the embankment. All at once the ground shook, and the whole atmosphere vibrated with a buzzing which grew swiftly to a roar. The ostler adjusting the horse to the trap let go shaft and strap to hold the head of the animal, while, with a clangour deafening to rustic ears, a huge locomotive rushed by with fiery mane, trailing lighted coaches. The express seemed to brush by them; they could feel the draught of its going.

The sight of a train speeding London-wards made Christmas moody. ‘Puffin’ Billy,’ as it was commonly called, had become, in his dreams of rescue and vengeance, as the winged sandals of Perseus, as Pegasus, as a pair of seven-leagued boots. Now that he knew the name of Lottie’s seducer the time of action seemed to have drawn appreciably nearer.

It was not in his character to act hastily. But ideas matured in lonely thought, fed and watered by slow reflection, attained to passionate growth in his untutored mind. New projects had no weight with him; but a scheme he had spent months elaborating grew a part of his being, a thing of reverence, and impious all abatement therefrom. The rhythm of labour like every narcotic facilitates rash thought, simplifying the impossible. Plans thus worked out came soon to rank as dogmas, unshakable as views inherited or instilled in childhood.

Squeezed between George Adolphus and the man called Army, Chris brooded on his one idea while the horse plodded out of the rain-dimmed town. The rush of gutter-spouts gave place in his ears to a murmurous patter of rain on leaves, subdued and natural, so closely consonant with the damp night that one had to listen for it. His kinsman too was grumpy, receiving the sing-song talk of his irrepressible

parasite with growls, part indignant, part affirmative. All three had their coat-collars turned up, backs a-bulge like stuffed sacks, and hats slouched low to shield their eyes from the downpour.

At length as they moved between hedges at the jog-trot proper to the animal, old Heaviland whispered in his kinsman's ear :

‘Any nooze o’ the wanderin’ ship?’

Chris shook his head ruefully.

‘A rum job that!’

George Adolphus held peace for a while, gazing straight ahead into the darkness where inky shapes of trees grew and faded. In time he went on :

‘I told ye how she come to me that time?’

Chris nodded.

‘And the lies she did act? . . . Well, I often catch myself a-thinkin’ on her. She come back to me temptin’-like, like the taste o’ good victual. I’m not a-gainsayin’ but what, had she stayed along o’ me a day or two, I might ha’ axed her to stay for good and all. I’m a man has got means and could ha’ give her comforts what a labourin’ man couldn’t. I’ll not say but what, was she to come back——’

Amazement made Chris break in :

‘Wa, Uncle bo’! Whatever be yow a-sayin’ of? I’d never ha’ thought—at your age——’

‘Ah, there it is—at my age! I be expected to ha’ no feelin’s more’n that old hoss; or leastways to hold ’em down, and so I dew; ’tain’t like when I were your age, then no one couldn’t hold me. But I were never the one to talk. . . . I ha’ thought on her smokin’, I ha’ thought on her drinkin’, indoors and out, in all weathers; and was she for to come back, I’d take and marry her—that’s the vardict.’

The notion of such an alliance was distasteful to Chris, ever fastidious in his views for Lottie. But the offer was undoubtedly a handsome one from the standpoint of village gossips. Not to hurt his kinsman’s feelings, he temporised, saying :

‘Well, I ha’ got a wrinkle from the chap I met this afternoon.’

‘What, yow never went and oped your heart to a stranger!’

‘Nay, but I told un some’at, seein’ as he’d lived like wi’ the same fam’ly. And he hit right off on Lord Elmsdale as the likely man.’

‘Lord Elmsdale!’ echoed George Adolphus in a vague, disheartened way. The introduction of a lord raised the entire drama, as on a pedestal, high above the plane of his aspirations.

CHAPTER XXIII

HUGH CALDERON TOUCHES LOVE UNAWARES

IN girlhood Enid's beauty had been striking, it is true; and of a kind which allures certain men. But apart from future possibilities which it little suggested, the impression conveyed had been sexless, and entirely free from that invitation born of a curiosity to know more of the male which, more or less coyly disguised, animates the behaviour of so many maidens when in a mixed company, and lends to it an extrinsic charm. She had been as a locked instrument of music, of which all might admire the form and fair workmanship. Now marriage had turned the key and bitter disillusionment had played the tuner. She vibrated to a zephyr, emanating the charm of her sex and age unconsciously, full of emotions astir beneath a seeming listlessness and discernible by a close observer.

Her beauty was suggestive, not satisfying. It induced yearning rather than hunger. Indeed, the idea of satisfaction agreed so little with her presence that mere worldlings, blind puppies routing for the teat of immediate pleasure, were chilled and disconcerted by her. But men of more delicate fibre would fall beneath the spell of that very property, floating and unfixable as a dragon-fly in the shade, which spelt unrest, infinitude, and, coeval with her being, insured against the void satiety.

The private opinion of many women among her acquaintance pronounced her odd and even dangerous, words used to classify the unusual. A few found her interesting. A greater number of men thought her superb. Her husband

bemoaned her cruelty ; and an unavowed, unsanctioned lover wished in his secret heart that she were more approachable.

She was indulging in the vanity of an attempt to see herself as others saw her, in the course of a solitary walk one evening near the close of summer. The day had been cloudless and very hot, lulling every faculty with a drowsy hum ; but now a gloom grew upon the sky, blotting the sunset as with giant ink-stains. From a little eminence, plumed with a clump of fir-trees growing on a gorse-clad bank beside the road, the low country spread out before her, coloured like a peacock's-tail by the play of evening light and cloud-shadows on a diversity of fields and woods. Here and there some brighter patch of herbage shone forth singly like an eye, by caprice of the encroaching cloud.

The hush of nature boded tempest ; but Enid, though alive to the menace, to the breathless expectation all around her, walked on nevertheless. Storm-tints harmonised with her feelings. Even a heavy spot of rain and a growl in the distance failed to turn her back.

Sidney, after maundering in his study all day, had been fractious when he joined her at tea. Seeming bent on provoking a quarrel, he had cavilled at every word that dropped from her. At last, the oppression of the afternoon having made her irritable, she had caught fire at his insistence on the fact that she took no interest in his pursuits. There had been sharp words, with the usual result in a lonely walk for her.

The open air, the rolling landscape, scattered voices and wide silences, were helpful to calm her : and till the amendment came she never turned. It had not come yet ; so on she walked, descending towards Hedgeham All Saints and the water-meadows.

That she did not leave Sidney was matter for wonder to herself just then. The incentive existed, but without adequate impulsion.

The cloud lowered angrily everywhere, formless but threatening, save at one point where it showed a soft pro-

tubérance of a lighter colour, for contrast like a woman's breast a-pout through dishevelled locks beneath the mad, strained face of a fury. Night came on before its time with skirts of sepia and indigo, with lurid streaks. The aspect of the heavens grew more and more threatening, but Enid still went on.

Avoiding the village of Hedgeham All Saints by convenience of a footpath, she rejoined the road beyond its last cottage, and crossed the fen. Her way, marked with white posts on either hand, was faintly luminous in the rich dimness of earth and sky.

She was sorry the storm took so long to break. There would be grim satisfaction in a good drenching. Rough elements commended themselves to her mood, as possibly counter-irritant. Ere she reached the rising ground on the Ditchley side, the play of lightning waxed brilliant, the distant woods thrown into sudden prominence, then lost altogether, showed forth again next minute in rigid bronze.

She was on the slope, with Ditchley Street some way off to her left, when a man accosted her.

‘Mrs. Boyne!’

In the dusk, under great elms which there shadowed the road, she had scarce heeded his approach, supposing it some labourer hastening home from work. The gentle tone was a shock. Recognising Mr. Calderon, she could not hide her annoyance.

He said: ‘There’s going to be a deluge. . . . There, I felt a drop. You’ll get soaked through. There’s a shed in this field; you must come in and shelter.’

Enid would fain have refused; but the stout reason of his speech coerced her and, as if to cut her off from escape, there came a patter of great drops among the leaves.

Opening the gate near, he hurried her into a paddock where in one corner stood a small erection, plank walls and roof of dry whins, enough to shelter a wagon. In the recess of this shanty rose a heap of straw which Hugh

assigned to her for a seat, while he himself remained standing. Enid, disregarding the suggestion, likewise kept her feet.

A downpour closed the mouth of their retreat as with a wall of frosted glass. The smell of earth grew rank in their nostrils. He told how he had been to visit a sick labourer, leaving his horse at a farm in All Saints; which explained the incongruity of his whip and riding-boots.

‘There’s something I have long been wanting to ask you, Mrs. Boyne. You remember that party at Ditchley last September? Why wouldn’t you dance with me then?’

Feeling that he was taking unfair advantage of her captivity, she said with impatience:

‘Oh, I was silly; I have to apologise. Though at the time I meant it. Fancy your remembering all this while! I had quite forgotten.’

After a silence, he said: ‘You don’t answer my question.’

‘Well, it’s a foolish thing to tell. I had overheard what you and some other gentlemen said just before, and I thought your criticisms insulting.’

‘Now it is my turn to plead forgetfulness,’ said Hugh gravely; and she was grateful to him for not laughing as she had apprehended.

‘Shall we change the subject? It’s not worth talking about.’ They were standing side by side, Hugh leaning against a pier of the rough wall; both gazing out at the ghostly white rainsheet, to which, rather than to one another, they addressed remarks.

The grumbling voice of a man approaching imposed silence. Enid shrank back appalled by the prospect of being discovered in compromising proximity to a man she disliked. Hugh, guessing her thought, planted himself before her. They ran little risk of detection, however, unless by actual contact, the darkness being intense in their refuge.

A figure grew out of the pallor at the shed’s mouth. The intruder came in, shook himself and dashed the rain from his clothes. He mused aloud:

'Damn this b—— rain! Just when I wanted to look a bit smart! If the bitch sees me shabby she'll treat me shabby; that's the world—blast it! Wish I'd found this 'ere shed a bit sooner; but that's just my b—— luck!'

Hugh's anger, that Enid should have to listen to this soliloquy, made him incautiously restive. The newcomer heard a noise.

'Hullo!' he exclaimed, turning and peering into the darkness. 'Got company, 'ave I?'

He groped deliberately towards the corner whence the noise had come.

'What! lovers?' he remarked, standing close to the pair and striking an attitude, as they could see by the faint light behind him. 'Well, I'm blowed! There's nothing 'll hinder 'em. Rain, or snow, or tempest, you'll find 'em in sheds and under 'edges same as when the moon shines bright. . . . Oho, my pretty dears, don't be shy! Don't let me interrupt; I've been at the game myself.'

'Keep your remarks to yourself, my man!' said Hugh Calderon threateningly, at which the man drew back.

'Beg pardon, sir, I'm sure. Never guessed it was a gentleman or I'd never 'ave made so free. I did come in out of the rain, sir, but for 'alf a crown I'd go out again and get sopped—just to oblige. I'm not one to spoil sport for a gentleman; but I've got a good suit o' clothes to spoil.'

The rain began to abate a little.

Enid in the extremity of her perturbation had not noticed Hugh's arm around her, perhaps because the support came timely.

'Well, I guess I'll clear out anyhow,' said their tormentor. 'But a gentleman, what *is* a gentleman, is more open-handed than that when he's out with a gal on the sly. I've known some'd give gold under the cirs. But I'm not the one to bear malice. Good-night, my dears! Sleep well!'

He was gone; and Enid was appalled to realise how entirely she had become merged in Hugh during the nasty

episode. They had been one person while it lasted. He still had his arm about her, but quite decorously, as a mere support, just near enough to the embrace to set her picturing. Recognition that she liked to be in contact with him filled her with a delicious kind of horror, as of one on the slide of baneful intoxication.

They remained in the same position for some time after the stranger had gone his way, till the drops had ceased to patter, and but the steady drip from trees abode of the downpour. Hugh made no move to release her. She knew it was wrong, madness, yet for long could not muster strength or presence of mind to withdraw from his arm. The knowledge that to have stood thus with her husband would have irritated her, made her feel profoundly wicked in face of the wellnigh mystical pleasure she now felt, a joy drawn from the fount of tears.

At length, for very shame, she bestirred herself. It was getting too silly. She extricated herself, saying :

‘I fancy it has stopped raining?’

‘No doubt it has, since you say so.’

She had been too long passive—nay, rapt, beneath his touch, to free herself with that utmost unconcern which alone could have cleared her once for all of the imputation of complicity. He must have felt her heart fluttering like a bird beneath his hand, must have divined the change his touch had brought to pass; there was no use in denying or pretending to repudiate anything. She was wroth with herself and with him, but simply said, ‘I fancy it has stopped raining’; to which he replied, ‘No doubt it has, since you say so.’

There snarled a note of raillery in his voice, a hidden spring of bitterness it pleased her to detect. Some men would have whined or maundered of the pleasure tasted, could it but have lasted for ever, and so on. Whether earnest or of mere gallantry, such talk would so have riled her just then that she could not but have burst forth in scorn. But this half-banter, with the pain beneath, was

disarming by its manliness, far enough from the heroic to escape comparison. To have the matter treated ironically was precisely what her own mood required. Freed from his arm, she had all at once turned savage, and was aware of herself as two persons, a virago guarding the approach to a languorous nymph.

‘I owe you many thanks for your kind protection from the weather,’ she said bitterly, as she moved off.

‘The thanks should come from me, I think ; but may I not have the pleasure——?’

‘I think not.’

The refusal was decided. He stood still for a minute, watching her retreat, then took a short stroll in the opposite direction ere deeming it discreet to follow. In the few words they had exchanged since the strange thrill of communion, heart had spoken plain to heart in these terms : ‘How can you—how dare you, a fellow-creature, cause me this pain?’

The storm was clean gone as Enid emerged from the hillside avenue, and the road with its white posts curled before her across the flat. The moon poured down her beams out of a sleek, soft sky that on one hand was olive, on the other had a copperish tinge. The landscape was as one vast aisle which moonlight flooded as with solemn music. Poplars, cottages, farmsteads, distant trees, had lost all prosaic identity to float vaguely as ideas or symbols. A wondrous thing had happened, a mystery on which she dared not dwell ; but all nature was grown more friendly.

The road, wet from the storm, was still not muddy ; the ruts round the bend above Hedgeham All Saints, where it compassed a fir-clad knoll, shone like foam-lines on the sea-beach. Turning at that spot she beheld first of all her own shadow, moving as she moved, set in a nimbus that seemed to emanate from it. Its clearness of contour startled her. Beyond, the road fell away undulating back to Hedgeham, the church of All Saints, the bridge by which she had but now crossed the stream ; and just emerging from the

village moved a figure on horseback which she knew for his. She sped on, full of joy and anger.

She paused on the doorstep of her home. The moonlit night tempted, so fair, so warm, full of magic charm and perfume like an Arabian treasure-cave. It was as a tale in which she had grown absorbed. She hated closing the book.

Standing in the gloom of the porch and listening along the way she had come, she fancied hoof-beats, and a flush that was also a shudder mantled all her body to fade again like the cloud raised on glass by a breath. Sudden panic precipitated her. She made haste to enter. Sidney's face appeared to her, bearing every mark of anxiety.

'My sweet, how could you run away like that?'

'How could I help it? It's the only way I know of throwing off my evil temper, and getting cool again and fit to speak to.'

'But so late! . . . And that thunderstorm!'

'Oh, Mr. Calderon found me in danger of getting drenched and was good enough to take me into a shed.'

'Ah,' said Sidney, reflecting; 'where did you meet him?'

'Oh, on the Hedgeham road.' She did not care to particularise.

'Did you say anything to him about mending the coach-house roof? There is a loose slate or two, and Miles says it ought to be seen to before the winter.'

'No, I forgot that,' said Enid.

It had cost her something to state the bare fact of her meeting with Hugh. The episode was sacred, and Sidney was profane. She disliked to hear him utter the name; 'Calderon' sounding disrespectful from his lips;—she, who earlier on that same day, held that name in abomination.

Although the change sprang on her thus unawares, it was really nothing new. For months, indeed ever since her marriage, she had been haunted by the dim conception of an ideal helpmate, a standard by which she had tried poor Sidney and found him wanting. It had only that evening dawned on her that the face of this familiar and Hugh's

face were the same ; yet it seemed, as she looked back, that the similitude of the spirit had not altered, that it had always from the beginning been Hugh. The antagonism with which he had always inspired her somehow supported this theory. A man worthy of hate is worthy also of love, she had acknowledged his worth at first sight ; her untamed, ill-conditioned nature had spoken after its kind, and she had never understood till now. How she hated her horrid nature ! It was complex when she would have it simple ; simple where it had best be deep.

CHAPTER XXIV

INCIDENTAL BUT RELEVANT

ONE morning, beckoned by a clear blue sky, Enid proposed to Sidney that they should drive over to Easterwick. She wanted to visit the old Anthonies. They could take lunch with them and eat it at an inn or on the sea-beach.

Sidney agreed, and about an hour later the victoria was at the door and they got in, the parlourmaid placing some rugs and a hamper of provisions on the seat opposite them. Miles in black livery on the box was respectability itself. His pompous figure up there in front of them gave a processional character to the long drive, as it had been the chancellor's mace or the pastoral staff of a bishop.

'What village is this?' asked Sidney, as they passed through a shady hollow with cottages scattered amid the rustling trees.

Miles threw back a name, catching which Sidney exclaimed:

'Why, this is the place Doctor Turner was talking of the other night at the Hall, where there's a suicide's grave at a cross-roads, trimmed and kept up by the villagers for generations. I should like to visit it.'

Again he referred to Miles.

'Suicide, sir? I never heard tell of that. But there's a place called Dead Man's Corner we shall pass presently.'

'That must be the place. Pull up when you get there!'

The road rose out of the village on to an upland where it ran straight and dusty for a mile, with only occasional shade from some squat oak of the hedge. At a point where a road

branched off at right angles, in the shade of a fine sycamore, stood a signpost newly whitened. Here Miles drew up.

‘I see no sign of a grave!’ said Enid.

‘Let’s walk up the lane a little way,’ said Sidney. ‘If we don’t find it soon we’ll give it up.’

They alighted. A farmhouse three fields off was the only dwelling in sight.

‘There’s nothing here,’ said Enid, when they had gone a couple of hundred yards.

‘If I mistake not, there’s the grave itself,’ said Sidney.

A grassy lane opened on either hand, and on the left, at the junction-point, a mound of smoother green peeped above the rank grass and cow-parsley growing beneath the hedge. On the top of the hummock some wild-flowers lay withered.

‘A pretty custom,’ murmured Enid. She tore a spray of honeysuckle from the hedge and laid it on the heap.

‘Prettier anyhow than the verdict of temporary insanity which nowadays gets them a blessing under false pretences.’

A snapping of twigs caused them to look up, when the face of an aged yokel appeared grinning at a gap in the hedge.

‘A pleasant mornun, sir and lady. Ah, yow be a-lookin’ together at our old grave. ’Tis mostly couples stop to look at that.’

Enid asked : ‘Who keeps it up?’

‘Oh, just any one which take the fancy, ma’am. I’ve give that a dewin-to myself in times. And the little gels’ll spread posies on ut. That be hunderds o’ years old, sir. That wer’ an old ancient grave time my father wer’ a boy. ’Tis said as how that go back to days afore the Roman Catholics was druv over seas by the Christians.’

They went back to their carriage, Enid smiling, Sidney in a brown study; and were borne on through sunny lanes sweet with honeysuckle, till the horizon grew bright before them with light flashed off from the sea.

The first they saw of Easterwick was a grey tower with crotcheted pinnacles at the end of a long tongue of heath

thrust in between fir woods. On the heath some men were employed in cutting dead bracken and piling it on wagons like corn. They wore smocks of nearly the same tint with the dry fern amidst which they stooped. Enid pointed them out to Sidney, who wished he had been a painter, to give permanency to such impressions.

Past the church which proved to be three parts ruin, they came presently in sight of the sea. As they drove down the slope of the village street, it rose as a bank of mist periwinkle-blue above the cottage-roofs. A dot of a steamer on the horizon, seen over the chimneys, with its thread of smoke, had an effect of mirage. The light had a gem-like quality by which the bricks and tiles of the cottages, the high hunched back and turning sails of a windmill attained pure flower-tints; hues more opaque of the surrounding fields, holding them in a comely setting as of leaves.

At the inn where they descended, an ostler in seafaring garb took a few steps to point out Mrs. Anthony's cottage which was close by, across a green. Sidney electing to smoke a pipe and arrange for lunch, Enid set off alone.

She saw a parallel in the case of the two old servants in their self-banishment with that of our first parents cast out from Eden. And, as if to bear her out in the conceit, there stood Thomas delving away for dear life in his garden-plot, in which a few thistles were actually growing, or her twinkling eyes deceived her.

Mopping his forehead, he stopped work and stared at her. Perplexity gave place to recognition on his face as the breath-mist clears from a pane. Forgetting manners in his excitement, he ran indoors, leaving Enid to lift the latch for herself.

Enid's short stay was taken up with Martha's exclamations and old Tom's corollaries. From the parlour-window she could see Sidney pacing up and down before the inn, and was anxious not to spoil his temper by keeping him too long waiting. But after lunch, when Martha in her Sunday

best walked down with her to the beach, they were able to gossip comfortably.

They sat on the shingle side by side. Every now and then, to punctuate a remark, Enid threw a pebble into the foam.

Martha shook her head over the change at the Abbey. When Enid observed that things were going on well there, that her father was happy and in excellent health, her posture was flatly incredulous. In vain Enid praised her stepmother: Martha only snapped her lips and smiled ironically.

‘Ah, you’re young, dear. You ’aven’t seen as much o’ the world as I ’ave.’

‘No, perhaps not; but I’ve seen a great deal more of Hermia.’

‘You don’t mean you call her that—not to her face?’

‘Yes, she prefers it.’

‘Well, I never did!’

And it was plain from Martha’s shocked expression that this was viewed as a new delinquency of the second Mrs. Glover.

‘It’s plain to see she’ve been gettin’ round you, Miss Enid; and ’eaven forbid as I should bring strife into families; but I took ’er measure long ago.’

The old woman’s obstinate rejection of facts grew wearisome. Enid was glad to get back to the cottage and hear old Thomas discourse of his garden.

Martha insisted on serving tea in state in her parlour, and Sidney’s presence at the meal put a curb on her tongue while she waited on them. He was almost a stranger to the old couple. Though making himself agreeable, he stood in the way of free intercourse, and Enid was concerned to realise how entirely he was foreign to the best part of her life.

It was dusk when they reached Hamford again, and the home atmosphere struck chill on Enid.

She led a secluded life at the White House, her resolve not to be involved in the petty jealousies of Elmondham

obliging her to receive few visitors. The Calderons were away on a round of visits. Though not exactly dull in the glorious autumn weather, she craved some event if only to distract her mind from criticising Sidney.

A pressing invitation from Ruth was the more acceptable for not including her husband. He made as much ado about her going up to town for a week as if the journey had been to the Antipodes, and the period of absence years.

Since the close of their honeymoon he had contracted a sedentary habit of mind as well as body, the ruminative languor of a mammal satisfied. He liked to realise possession by a slow perusal, to spin out enjoyment beyond the moment and fill time with it, like a miser counting gold; and for that pastime required of her some of the obedience of a painter's model. His life's material end gained, it only remained to enjoy it, to dream over it, and to distil from its contemplation, quintessence of æstheticism, some poem to rank with the great heart-throbs of antiquity. Her part in the domestic scheme was to be his Muse in harness, a rôle he thought any woman might covet. The race was over, it remained but to realise the prize.

For Enid the race was but beginning, a difference he failed to perceive, holding, in spite of affected theories, the stereotyped view of matrimony as a goal for women. It vexed him that her mind should still be seeking, exploring, aspiring; as if, having found love, there could be anything left to seek. Her restless energy was very distressing to one who would have made of the house and grounds a sufficient Eden. He saw something shattered, which no one else could see; and inability to explain his chagrin embittered it yet the more. He grew fractious as a child when some play-mate breaks the rules of make-believe.

Enid thought him needlessly exacting, and resented his wish to imprison her. As the train slid away from the platform, leaving Sidney behind, she felt light as a bird let out of an enclosing hand. A week's holiday would prove tonic. She abounded in good resolutions for her return.

In the same compartment sat Mrs. Turner, a doctor's wife of Elmondham, with whom she was on speaking terms. A fortnight previous, there had been a party at Ditchley Abbey, of scope wide enough to include the small fry of the district. Mrs. Turner reminded Enid of their meeting there. Habitually gushing, she harped on Mr. Glover's second marriage in a high key of enthusiasm. She thought it 'beautiful.' It almost seemed as if she thought second marriage in the abstract more beautiful than first. . . . And Mrs. Glover was such a charming hostess, so refined, so gracious, so perfectly tactful ! . . .

Enid kept assenting, bewildered at first by the flood of adjectives. But, not altogether unversed in the ways of Elmondham, where gossip was carried to as fine an art as poisoning under the Borgias, she presently perceived that these rhapsodies were a trap to find out, by overstating the case and so courting correction, to what extent his daughters resented Mr. Glover's marriage. In Elmondham they were said to be furious.

There might be children—a son and heir. How delightful that would be !

'Delightful,' Enid agreed.

'Oh, my dear ! How sweet, how beautiful of you to say that ! When, of course it would alter your prospects to such an extent ! It is so rare to find any one truly disinterested ; people are so mercenary. You must let me kiss you !'

The lady fairly pounced on Enid, carried away with admiration of such magnanimity.

The respectable age, twice her own, of the doctor's wife, prevented Mrs. Boyne from administering a direct snub. She allowed her to tire herself out, taking advantage of every breathing-space to look out of the window at trees bowing to a gale beneath drifting clouds. The wind buffeted the flying train as though it had a spite against it. Its tumult mingling with the rattle of their going made a din it was a strain to talk against. Presently rain came dashing on the panes as if flung from a bucket. The

prospect became a blur, it was useless to look forth any more.

Mrs. Turner spoke of Sidney. What a charming man : how clever ; how devoted ! Only the other day she had been saying to the doctor how she wished all married pairs were as united as Mr. and Mrs. Boyne. Enid listened patiently but took swift leave of her companion when they reached the terminus.

‘Stuck-up puss !’ was Mrs. Turner’s comment, with a brisk change of expression, as she looked after her. ‘A draper’s daughter, and such airs !’

The long cab-drive through lighted streets to Kensington was a real delight to Enid. With one reservation, it was the first time in her life that she had travelled quite independently. At last she was out of leading-strings. It had stopped raining. The glow of lamps shone on the wet pavements as on polished marble. Leaning back in the hansom, she was sheltered from the wind which, chopped by sharp corners of buildings and shattered to a hundred separate gusts, hurtled this way and that to harass wayfarers. She saw resolute faces under tight-clutched hats. A gentleman in pursuit of his topper dived under her horse’s nose which almost touched the back of a lumbering van wherein a boy sat whistling. She looked on as an illiterate person at a panorama.

Towards Kensington, where there was less traffic, the road was bordered with plane-trees, and fallen leaves lay on the footways like shells on a dusky beach. They rose and ran suddenly as things alive.

When she told of her pleasure in the drive, Ruth laughed at her for a country-bumpkin. Ruth seemed to think it grand to mock at everything natural. Her railing manner chilled Enid, making her wonder what souring influence there could be in a prettily furnished house and the full yet easy life her sister led.

She soon heard of grievances. First and foremost, they kept no carriage. Kenneth said they were not rich enough :

‘as if it were his money,’ Ruth put it rather viciously. All their friends being carriage-people, she detested having to pay calls in a hired turn-out. Kenneth was horribly stingy; they went to the theatre once in a blue moon; and he had puritanical notions which kept her from knowing smart people.

‘And then there’s papa’s marriage with that hateful Garland-woman; and the worst of it is, they may have children. She’s young enough, you know. If there were a son, we shouldn’t get much beyond our settlements. I don’t know what Kenneth’d say to that. He only married me for the money.’

Enid felt glad that she, and not Ruth, had been fated to travel up with Mrs. Turner from Elmondham.

She pitied Kenneth.

That he had, in some sort, married for money he would himself have owned. Arrived at the age of thirty, with a natural taste for domesticity; holding, moreover, the opinion, common in his set, that no man ought to meditate settling down with a girl on a penny less than two thousand a year; himself possessing but seven hundred; he had naturally looked about for a wife with money. There was nothing sordid in that. It was in the maiden’s interest as much as his own, for his soul shuddered at the thought of subjecting any lady to the privations of life with him on an income which barely supplied his bachelor wants.

A man of regular life, sound and of good lineage, he was eligible in every sense but the pecuniary for the hand of a Duke’s daughter; therefore could not be called a mere fortune-hunter. He really admired Ruth, and the coincidence of that admiration with her heiress-ship to the profits of a huge drapery business brought about his proposal. The perspective of a comfortable home with an accomplished and well-looking helpmate, had diverted him from study of the character of his betrothed. Her personality becoming merged in his preconceived scheme of happiness, he fell deep in love with her. And in marriage he had found a

great deal of satisfaction, though he could have wished her of another temper. He disliked her saying, in her tiffs, that he had married her for her money. In his view of it, the bargain had been a fair one.

On the last night but one of Enid's visit, Ruth caught a chill at a draughty concert-hall, and the next day kept her bed. She besought Enid to abide her recovery, Kenneth warmly seconding the entreaty. Enid wrote to Sidney accordingly: it was only for a few days longer, she was sure he wouldn't mind, and the change was benefiting her greatly.

Deputed to do Ruth's shopping, Enid took delight in threading London by what were, for her, adventurous ways, feeling like Haroun-Al-Raschid without his responsibilities. The account of her wanderings amused Ruth, who wondered at her noticing so many things. She, for her part, could not bear being jostled.

They were better friends now than when always together, though still as different in their thoughts as red from white.

Ruth's illness was severe for two days: on the third she was able to come down to lunch and examine a hat her maid was trimming for her. There arose a question of matching some velvet, a peculiar shade of mauve, and Enid volunteered to try the shops in Kensington High Street.

The quest proved a long one. Wishing to be back in time for tea, for it was Ruth's 'at home' day, she got into an omnibus, of which the conductor, craning from the step, trilled and fluted away with the shrill persistence of a canary in the sun.

Alighting at the corner of the road where her sister lived, she nearly ran into her husband's arms. The encounter gave a grin to passers-by.

'My darling! I couldn't do without you any longer!'

'Oh, couldn't you?' said Enid, unknowing what she said, extremely confused between wonder what Ruth would

say to his inroad, and the wish to appear glad to see him. He was carrying a bag she perceived, had come prepared to spend the night. The fact that they would enter the house together made it the more awkward, as the task of explanation must devolve on her.

There were several visitors in the drawing-room.

‘Well, I never! . . . What devotion!’ cried Ruth, coming to welcome him. She was more cordial than ever before. ‘Now we’ve got you here we shall keep you for a day or two. I’ve a good mind to make it a week; it would serve you right for begrudging us Enid.’

She turned to enlighten the callers, who forthwith indulged in some ladylike banter at the expense of the loving couple. It covered Enid in shame, which passed for modesty. She was miserable at being sorry to see Sidney.

At dinner that evening, Kenneth said: ‘You should take a house in town for the winter—or, better still, a furnished flat; you mustn’t bury yourselves down at Hamford all the year round.’

‘Oh, you can’t be going to spend the winter in that place!’ cried Ruth feelingly.

Sidney looked to Enid, who said that they had not thought of moving.

‘But it wouldn’t be “moving,”’ Ruth insisted. ‘People don’t call it moving to go abroad or to Bournemouth for a couple of months. And the winters are jolly in town; there’s a regular season; though we don’t see much of the gaiety, Kenneth is so horribly stay-at-home. Come—to save yourselves from dying of dulness!’

‘Oh, there’s no fear of dulness,’ said Sidney, bestowing on his wife a look of fulsome affection.

When the two women retired to the drawing-room, Ruth said almost crossly to her sister:

‘Why do you let him tyrannise over you? I wouldn’t stand it. It’s like burying you alive to keep you in that hole.’

‘Oh, we may as well live there as anywhere,’ Enid replied

in a colourless voice; then with more confidence, as one striking truth in the quicksand of equivocation. 'Besides, I do really prefer the country to live in. And it's nice and near home.'

'I don't call that a recommendation, with that woman mistress there. But you've got nice neighbours in the Calderons.'

'Ye—es,' assented Enid with some hesitation.

The reminder of Hugh Calderon sadly complicated her thoughts of Hamford.

Sidney's arrival having robbed her of any wish to stay longer in London, on the morrow they went down by a morning train.

All around the White House the trees showed skeletons, dead leaves whirled and flew like birds. When Enid walked out next morning she found the lanes almost dismantled in her absence. Jack Frost—or as the country-people fable, old Nick—had been among the brambles, spitting poison on ripe clusters of blackberries which were puffed and livid in death. All flowers had perished, with the exception, here and there, of a sprig of wild succory, whose blossom seemed the open eye of winter, so icy blue it was. The sky had dropped lower. She felt nipped, oppressed by the gloom which would last for months, yet the feeling appealed to her somehow as befitting her plight. Sidney had reason, perhaps, to complain of her coldness. She *was* cold, bloodless, unsociable; lacking a heart.

Up the lane in which she sauntered came a lad running for dear life.

'Ta squire, mum! Felled down off his hoss! Kilt to death, and all a mask o' blood! I be a-bearin' ta sad news to E'ndham! And I hope I'll be farst, but there's others runnin'!'

She could hear his hard breathing as he dashed by.

A little later came two horsemen galloping abreast.

'It's unfort'nate, farst meet o' the season. But the chap was a duffer—must ha' been. Good-mornin', ma'am!'

The speaker reined in his horse and rode back, lifting his hat. He was a tenant of her father's, and she managed to ask : ' Is he much hurt ? '

' What—young Clark ? No warse than a broken head, I reckon ! '

' I—I thought . . . I was told it was Mr. Calderon. '

Her head drooped a little. It was annoying to have to make the avowal, annoying to have been made to suffer on a false pretence, most annoying, most shameful to have learnt that her very blood was a traitor, and Hugh Calderon lord of all save her countenance. That, she was determined, he should never have.

' God love ye, no, ma'am ! Don't yow consarn yerself. 'Tis a feller o' no account, as you may say—young Clark, the vet's son, from Stenham. Mr. Calderon ha'nt been out with us this mornin'. I don't believe he be home yet. I wonder now how that tale got about. Most like 'twas one o' these here boys—young blackguards ! I heerd one on 'em hollerin' out the squire was dead. '

' Yes, it was a boy who told me, ' said Enid. And she went home with a stern will to chastise herself, to be tame to Sidney from that day forth.

CHAPTER XXV

A DARK DAY

ON a winter's Sunday Mrs. Boyne walked over to morning service at Ditchley. Overnight Sidney had ridiculed the pilgrimage, expounding the vanity of it. His opposition, which from mocking grew fretful, turned what had been a passing whim into a fixed resolve. She would have gone through a snowstorm, in an earthquake.

As she walked across the marshes and over a rough bridge thrown for cattle to cross the stream, moving in the still hoar morning like a fly on the dimness of a frosted pane, she was aware of going to church for self-assertive rather than devotional reasons. Having exhausted the fuel for sarcasm to be found in her going so far to worship, Sidney had turned to the pedestrian aspect of the expedition. It was not nice, he had said, that people should see her always on foot. It might even be called degrading for one in her position. They kept a carriage: why not use it? People would wonder, seeing him drive out more often than his wife.

In fact he, who had formerly been a constant walker, had now, in the change of circumstances, come to depend on the carriage, the servants, and a hundred little auxiliaries to comfort and convenience, far more than Enid, whose girlish contempt for those vanities had been quite sincere and without analogy to sour grapes.

From all points of the horizon, padded in breath-like mist, the moan of church-bells came fitfully, exactly the noise obtained by stroking the rim of a glass with moistened

finger ; benumbed music in keeping with the frozen landscape and the curdling haze. By degrees the frosty air, and the vapour alight inwardly like a pearl, overcame memories, compelling her to look forward.

On the upland by the windmill the air grew somewhat clearer. In places the mist hung so thin as to show the colour of the blue sky behind ; in others trees appeared as ghostly shadows, seeming adrift in space. But on descending again to the level of the marshes and traversing Ditchley Street, the fog was dark and heavy once more, too dense for the sun to pierce. Her footsteps, with those of others wending churchward, clinked on the frostbound road as on an anvil.

As she drew near to the school, she heard sounds of singing, and presently a long train of school-children, arrayed in every description of jacket, hat, and comforter, came forth. She loitered to give them the start of her. They wound off into the white cloud muffling everything, in a nether mist of their own breath and chatter, two or three prim teachers shepherding them in attitudes of mercy.

Idlers at the church gate and in the lich-way whispered at her approach and tittered a little after she had passed, a tribute to her rareness. A gathering of oldsters on the stone benches in the porch pulled forelocks reverently as she went in, and the clerk with much ceremony ushered her to the Abbey pew, where her father and stepmother were already seated. Hermia made room for her with a smile, and her father beamed from the other end of the seat.

As she knelt down, a single bell began tolling high up in the tower. Its sound reached her, attenuated as from a great distance. A number of gaffers and hobbledahoys forthwith came rolling in, with grinning red faces and clatter of hobnailed boots, to swell the congregation, till then nearly all women.

The service with its antiphonies—a murmur succeeded by a dull roar which fell again to the murmur, to swell out presently in raucous song—and the tinted gloom reposed

Enid. It was all so peaceful and aloof from the outer life that she was quite annoyed by her father's fidget during the lessons, felt along the whole thick cushion of the seat.

She grew dreamy, dazed as with a heady perfume, and was almost startled when, after a hymn, she heard a voice say, 'In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Amen,' and, looking up, saw the white surplice in the pulpit, miraculously translated thither from the reading-desk where it had been a minute since. The first words of the sermon transfixed her. Thenceforward to the peroration she sat intent, with drooping head, alone with the preacher, who seemed to be reading her inmost heart.

His subject the sanctity of marriage, he inveighed against those who married for mere desire of the eyes; against all who did so lightly or for worldly advancement. He quoted passages from the marriage-service as evidence to the tremendous solemnity of the contract; and Enid lay crushed for a minute, annihilated by the sense of her own shortcomings. She had entered that holy state lightly, unthinking, in a condition of somnambulism.

'They,' said the preacher, 'who approach this holy sacrament unfitly, find in it their punishment, as is the case with every holy thing received unworthily. From a blessing it becomes a curse; from a lovely shrine, a prison of the soul, which beats vainly against the bars, bruising her breast, her wings, seeing love without. And if it escape, again like a caged bird it will find no friend among its kind. It will be harried and persecuted and wounded unto death. My friends, it is an awful thing to strive with God. . . .'

Every word stabbed Enid. She beheld herself caged, imprisoned; saw herself bound by sacred ties to something apish. She was shocked at the violence of her own repugnance. Idolising reason, she had always rather scoffed at the emotional in religion, yet here she sat a-twang to the preacher's words like a very Methodist. It was a relief and at the same time a downfall when the vicar turned at length to the East, murmuring forth the doxology.

During the singing of the last hymn she stood as one in a trance, seeming outside herself. She beheld in a gliding picture her whole progress from childhood to that hour.

Issuing at length into the churchyard, bounded in a mist opaline with sunbeams foiled and held, her stepmother said: 'You must come home to lunch with us.' Hermia's face was haggard, almost as if she had been crying. Mr. Glover expressed in gait and visage the Englishman's natural relief at escaping from the house of God. He was looking younger, his daughter thought; but that might be only because his wife looking worn lightened the contrast with which he had to contend.

'My, what a sermon!' said one of a group of girls who hurried by them down the path. 'I hardly knowed where to cast my eyes. I wonder he have the face to stand up and say such things.'

Enid was amazed to hear this and similar comments passed on a discourse which had seemed to her to soar above earth, and earth's grossness.

'We came walking,' said Hermia. 'I hope you're not too tired. But at all events it's nearer than Hamford.'

'But really . . . There's Sidney, you know!'

'Oh, Sidney can exist without you for a few hours! We'll send some one with a message to set his mind at rest.'

Hermia's tired eyes besought her, while her father chuckled: 'Come, my dear child, come along!' as though he saw something festive in their forgoing.

As they struck into the field-path Lottie had taken to go home on the day of Enid's elopement, he said:

'Ruth and Kenneth come down to-morrow.'

Enid seemed not to hear. She was shivery with the associations of the swelling field and the hedge like bristling hair along its brow.

'For the Christmas-party, you know,' her father went on. 'By the bye, you and Sidney must spend the night when it comes. . . . This is the last day your mamma and I shall have alone together for some little while.'

His last sentence closed with a sigh, which might have embarrassed Enid with a sense of intrusion had she not appreciated the disturbing nature of Ruth's visits. From the bottom of her heart she pitied Hermia. Ruth in tutelage had been sufficiently tiresome; Ruth with the dignity of marriage, as a separate and hostile power, enjoying moreover the new and intimate advantage of relationship to her aversion, would, she conceived, be simply insufferable. No wonder her stepmother looked careworn.

It was cosy, after lunch, to be led to her own little sitting-room not much altered since she used to sit there dreaming, fuming and conspiring with poor Lottie.

No room in the world so repaid a fire. It glowed in every nook and corner, perceptibly in broad daylight, setting up a standard of comfort by which other apartments were tried and found wanting. The sun, which before luncheon had suffused the haze with promise of scattering it, had now again drawn in his beams. The outlook of trees and grass benumbed in whitish mist was bitterly cold, but the warmth of the little room repelled the suggestion, giving to the prospect the status of a hungry-eyed onlooker, of a starved peri at the gate of paradise: mere cause for congratulation to the blessed safely garnered within.

Enid, lolling in her familiar arm-chair, hands clasped behind her neck, and eyes glassing the blaze, reconstructed her life as it had flowed there, before the rapids, the fall, the great catastrophe. It surprised her to find how little she coveted return to that former state. Though longing for change, she would still be going forward. To abdicate free sight in favour of blinkers, to forgo knowledge and return to childish ignorance, was a wish too pusillanimous, too unenterprising. The very idea of a retrograde movement was distasteful.

Hermia, leaning forward in a brown study, staring at the live coals as though they held some secret she would fain discover, startled her by suddenly saying:

‘Enid!’

The name was uttered so tragically as at once to silence its owner and throw her on her knees beside the sufferer.

‘You remember what I told you once about my first marriage—how I ran away with a groom? . . . Well, Elmsdale was wrong, I was wrong, the paper lied . . . He is alive. He never went to the Cape. He sold the berth we booked for him to some one else, and has gambled and drunk away the money we raised to start him as a colonist.’

Enid had no word. Ordinary phrases of compassion would have rung base and counterfeit. She could only press Hermia’s hand, which was very cold.

‘I have known it since last August. You may remember, one night there was a thunderstorm? Well, that afternoon, I received a note which told me that man lived! . . .’

Proceeding, Hermia lost the frozen calm with which she had begun the confession, and grew animated, vehement when it came to defending her conduct.

‘I was too utterly ashamed and confounded to take much thought. . . . The note appointed a place of meeting, and I went there in the evening. I waited all through that storm. Just as it was clearing, he came. . . . I tried to outface him at first, but I was unnerved, while he was cool and sneering, even jocular.’ She shuddered. A slight contraction like a sneer expressed her loathing of the memory. ‘Of course he had come for money; and I was willing to give him all I have of my own—you know it isn’t much. I promised him first one hundred pounds, then two hundred, and at last five hundred pounds to go away and never trouble me more. I got home, as you may imagine, wet through from the downpour, and, before going to bed, wrote out a cheque to bearer for the sum agreed, which I put in an envelope and directed as he had bidden me. It was in this room—at this table. . . .’

‘Your father came in just as I was finishing. I had to prevent his touching me and finding out that my dress was wet. I did so long to tell him all; but I dared not. It

seemed so unnaturally cruel that I, to whom he has shown nothing but kindness, should have interwoven this foul strand with the clean respectable web of his private life.

‘Oh, Enid love! You and Ruth used to think me severe and prudish, I know. If you had only known the blemishes, the weaknesses, the cutting self-consciousness which first drove me to wear that mask, you would not, perhaps, have disliked and distrusted me quite so much.’

The firelight flickered on both their faces. Enid’s eyes sparkled; Hermia’s were dry and hard. Both watched the blaze, Enid kneeling beside her stepmother, her cheek pressed to Hermia’s shoulder.

‘He will come back again. It is my nightmare every hour!’

‘Why not tell papa?’ It was the first word Enid had uttered since the disclosure.

‘How can I? Tell him that I am not really his wife; that if I have a child it will be illegitimate? . . . Don’t ask it!’

Enid persevered in her view.

‘All that, it seems to me, is only a matter of names. Can there be unintentional sin? And I think in this case it would be best to face the matter out boldly. I know nothing of the law, but surely it must be on your side. . . .’

‘But the scandal, child! You forget the scandal. It would kill your father, who prizes his respectability above everything. Business-people are more particular in that way than dukes and duchesses.’

A servant came to announce that tea was served in the drawing-room.

‘I’m glad I’ve told you,’ said Hermia, as they made their way through a labyrinth of passages to the well of the great staircase leading down into the hall. ‘But I dread the visit of Ruth. One hates to be stared at after a good cry: you know the feeling.’

A clock struck four in silvery tones as they entered the drawing-room.

Old Simon laid aside a magazine into which he had been dipping, and, with legs stretched towards the fire, rubbed his hands cheerily.

‘Really, it’s remarkable the trades people take up nowadays,’ he observed. ‘I’ve just been reading an account, written by himself, of a man who makes two thousand a year net income by rearing and selling guinea-pigs; for which, it seems, there is a demand, owing to their use in cheap eating-houses as a substitute for rabbits. You might suggest that to Sidney, my love; it’s more paying than poetry. There is also the account of a lady of title who makes, I forget how much, but it’s in four figures, by trimming hats exclusively for sale in the East End of London, where a peculiar taste is said to reign. You should read the article, my dear. It is entitled “Some Curious Callings,” and is really most interesting. I think of sending it to Land who is always in distress at the idleness of that boy of his. There are so many ways of earning money mentioned—some of them quite new to me—that one of them might happen to fall in with the dandified notions of my godson . . .’

To hear her father run on in that vein of contentment was terrible to Enid, who could see the bounds of the fool’s paradise in which he sported. It was a relief when, about five o’clock, Sidney was announced. Having received notice of her whereabouts, he had come with the carriage to fetch her.

On the homeward drive, Enid, though quite suave of demeanour towards her husband, was absent-minded; and he had to repeat a question twice ere she answered it. It was: ‘You do love me, don’t you—just a little?’

And she, emerging from deep thought, full of fate as a Greek tragedy, archly responded: ‘Just a little!’ wondering at the ease with which she could act the lie.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE CHRISTMAS GATHERING; LORD ELMSDALE AND HIS SISTER

LORD ELMSDALE was bidden to his sister's Christmas-party; and his lordship came, though, for reasons unknown, but partly suspected, of Hermia, he would fain have been excused. The Lands, father and son, were invited at Mr. Glover's petition; and in reply, old Stephen exempted himself on grounds of business, but accepted for Freddy, who, far from following in his father's careful steps, figured as a man about town: took his pleasure, that is to say, in the most expensive forms, haunted bars and restaurants in the neighbourhood of Piccadilly Circus, and fancied himself in society.

From the first morning, Kenneth Stoke evinced a strong distaste for the company of the said Freddy. And it needed but this aversion of her husband to make Ruth feel drawn to the young man. She extolled him as 'well-groomed' and 'well-dressed,' to Kenneth who, of all men, had the attributes of neatness and good taste.

Her husband no longer interested her.

She had ascribed to marriage the virtue of a coronation, had looked to be ennobled by it in a signal and enjoyable manner, to be lifted out of her former equivocal station and set high among the great of the land. But the ordinance had failed to work wonders.

The honeymoon had been amusing. But since their return to England, life in an unpretentious house at Kensington had been humdrum and prosaic compared with her dreams of what marriage would bring. The reality proved quite

sober and disappointing. Kenneth's friends who called on her were quiet people; she thought them dowdy; and though he took her out a good deal, she was not sought after as she had expected to be.

The fact was, Kenneth had never been of great account in the circles he frequented, being one of those well-dressed, well-appointed, well-behaved men whose presence is so certainly inoffensive that it may be called welcome, but whose absence is unfelt and seldom remarked. By marrying he had lost what little intrinsic value he had formerly possessed for exalted hostesses; and far from his wife being received with him on the old footing, he himself was now relegated to the distance of a bowing acquaintance. Ruth had counted on her vantage-ground as an heiress; but her father only allowed her, as he allowed Enid, a thousand a year, and no one asked of her expectations.

This state of affairs would have been less offensive had Kenneth suffered her to make smart friends of a lower grade. But he was strict in his views for her. Many a sprightly dame, out riding between love and duty, who smiled and nodded to him, was choked by his return courtesy. Ruth was not so particular; she would have rather liked to know a fast set. Her life had been so deadly dull hitherto that a little dissipation seemed owing to her. Thus she was quite prepared to give rein to frivolity even before fraternising with young Land, who appeared the smart man of her visions.

His glibness in uttering the names of illustrious men and women, and proprietary knowledge of their habits, gave her the highest opinion of his pot-house existence. He offered theatre and supper-parties in perspective; whatever Kenneth might say, she determined not to lose sight of him when they returned to town. He, for his part, thought her a deuced fine woman, and was puffed up by her preference of him, chiefly because she was the wife of Captain Kenneth Stoke, whose name had long been familiar to this student of society as retailed in the public press.

He fetched and carried for her, was her constant squire, and, had he been of equestrian rank, would have had to reckon with her husband. As things actually stood, Kenneth could not believe his wife in earnest, and only avoided the bugbear, conquering the nausea with which Freddy's overtures inspired him when positively obliged to converse with him.

Young Land, to do him justice, had not the slightest rancour for Ruth's husband. It was with a certain fervour of obsequiousness that he brought forth his cigar-case whenever he saw Captain Stoke's lips unprovided. And, to avoid seeming rude, Kenneth sometimes accepted the proffer, though such traffic was noisome, almost contaminating, to his exclusive soul.

Hermia, displeased at Ruth's conduct, was most kind to Kenneth. But he was a man always on tiptoe with women; and, if he felt her sympathy, it left him as it found him, uncommunicative.

It was to Elmsdale that he unbosomed himself; and the worthy peer was puzzled to find adequate grounds for so tremendous a detestation; his own nature being to tolerate even enemies, at any rate in cold blood. He imputed Stoke's bitterness to jealousy.

'Well, old chap,' he remarked in his candid way once as they sat together over the smoking-room fire; 'you've got what you bargained for—the money-bags. I don't see that you can grumble.'

'It's not that,' said Kenneth, teeth on edge. The comment was rasping. 'It's this fellow Land—little beast!'

'Little beast' was strong language for Stoke. Elmsdale, pleased with the rôle of mentor, thought it but right to rebuke him.

'Oh, he's well enough; it's the way you look at him. He's a cad if that's what you mean; but you can't quarrel with him for that. Might as well curse a dog for wagging his tail, "which it is his nature to"—that's Shakespeare,

that is. I can't say I cotton to him myself; but as for barring a chap to that extent . . .'

'He's not making up to your wife.'

'No, he ain't,' and, after a pause, as if for his own instruction:

'No, he's not making up to my wife. You're right; that makes a difference. I dare say I should be as jealous as you are . . .'

'But I'm not jealous, I tell you; only a bit sick!'

'Same thing,' said Elmsdale magisterially; and out of the old clothes-bag of a retentive memory he produced some not very clean samples of his own garb of jealousy in the past, so little relevant to the case before him that Stoke, rather abruptly, rose and gave the lecturer the room to himself.

When Hermia called her husband's attention to Ruth's silly behaviour, Simon pooh-poohed. Freddy had been well brought up and Ruth, his own daughter, would of course think nothing wrong. The lifelong association of their respective fathers made it natural they should be like brother and sister. If Kenneth was annoyed, as Hermia implied, it was very silly of him. In his heart he attributed their levity to the natural sympathy of youth for youth. His own exceeding happiness with Hermia, with the slackening and slightly demoralising effect of such late blossomings, would have made him tolerant of anything in the shape of a love-affair.

Kenneth was a good deal older than Ruth and made the mistake of never stooping to her. He was much too staid, too sedate, more so than belonged to his age which was great only when compared with hers. A man turned thirty should make allowances for a wife of twenty-one. From old Simon's throne in the sixties they were all a pack of youngsters together.

Lord Elmsdale now, as of old, retreated to the conservatory after breakfast, but it was not so easy as formerly for Hermia to find him there alone, since Captain Stoke

markedly preferred a pipe with him to playing the ignominious part of gooseberry for Ruth and Freddy. She wanted to have Ralph quite to herself for a few minutes. After many frustrated attempts to catch him solitary, on the third day of his visit she summoned him to the little boudoir which had once been Enid's, where she was used to sit in the afternoons.

She ordered Bennet, who had brought her coffee, to go to the smoking-room and request his lordship to join her.

The man lingered a moment with rather a red face, and she was going to say, 'You can go!' when, with a cough, he blurted:

'His lordship is upset, I fear, madam.'

'He was all right at luncheon!'

'I took a note to him just now, ma'am. It was left at the back door by some one from the village. And his lordship took it very bad indeed. Cussed and swore at me somethink hawful, my lady. I ain't accustomed to such language when in discharge of my duty.'

Wounded dignity transpired from his whole bearing.

'Ask him to come to me at once,' said Mrs. Glover resolutely. And Bennet went, satisfied that a rod was pickling for his insulter.

'Well, Hermia. What the devil is it?' and 'I say, look at this!' exclaimed his lordship in one breath as he flounced into the sitting-room.

'Sit down, Ralph!' said his sister in her imperial manner; and my lord subsided. Still very red, he held out a soiled note piteously.

'I say, do just look at this!'

The tragic warning of her white face made him draw in the hand with the paper as a snail its horns.

'Listen to me, Elmsdale; I've been wanting to speak to you ever since you came. . . . I'm in the most awful predicament—vile—loathsome; there's no word bad enough. Do you know Garland is alive?'

'Rot!'

Lord Elmsdale gaped widely, the fumes of his private wrath suddenly dissipated.

‘I tell you he is! I’ve seen him; he’s been here in the park. I gave him money. . . .’

‘More fool you! I bet it isn’t really the man, but some other man he confessed to before he died. It’s the old Tichborne dodge over again——’

Hermia’s tranquillity was incisive as she interrupted: ‘Do you think I could be taken in like that?’

‘Well, well; you needn’t get waxy; you can never know; I only made the suggestion,’ murmured his lordship, retreating from her vehemence. ‘But you may set your mind at rest, for I don’t believe he has any legal claim on you. The minute I get back to town, I’ll run down to the Temple and ask young Fairfax. He’ll always give me counsel’s opinion for nothing. How much did you give the toad?’

‘Five hundred.’

‘Five . . . Jerusalem! Where did you get it from? Does old Glover know then?’

She winced. He had probed the sorest place of all.

‘No. I happened to have that sum at the bank, a part of Aunt Farlow’s legacy. I’m so terribly afraid he’ll come again.’

‘Of course he will; as sure as any other beggar comes back to the house where he’s been well treated.’

‘That’s no consolation to me!’

‘No, poor old girl. I must think it out: give me time. On second thoughts, I’ll write to-day to Fairfax.’

‘Write! . . . My dear boy, I would not write of it even to you!’

Her brother’s inability to realise her anguish in even touching on the subject exasperated Hermia.

‘Well, as you like; only writing would have been quickest. Anyway I’ll see to it. And just you promise not to go giving any more money, whatever happens! Upon my soul, I believe the straightforward way’s the best: tell Glover. He might take it all right—who knows?—and the

old boy once in the secret, the ground's cut from under that blackguard's feet. . . . Cheer up, old girl! It's awkward, I allow—a devilish mess! But you're not to blame; and I believe we can get a decree or injunction or something to floor the chap. . . . Now do, for God's sake, look at this.'

Having said enough to content her, as he considered, the flood of his own private feelings, arrested like Jordan for the passage of a superior power, rushed on once more. His eyes glared and gobbled at her while she read. Consternation, disgust, anger, and amusement, blent in his look, were separately discernible.

The envelope was directed to 'Vycount Elmsdail vizziting at Ditchley Abbey,' and it contained the following words scrawled on a half-sheet of cheap notepaper:

'Sm,'—The ink had the paleness it acquires in cottages from the practice of filling up with water when the supply gets low—'I know you for sartin to be in communications with my sister, C. Heaviland. If you be a gentleman and have the feeling of a Christin man and not a durty blaggard as which I shall call you if you refus to tell me you will tell me and father wher to find her. Which suppose you have act honorable you would not wish for to hide being as there wouldnt be no reason to be shamed but rather contrairy. The best would be for you to meat me somewers man to man, but in case you be too proud to talk along of her brother what you did rong i shall be satisfyd for the presint with a letter giving the adress. if not you will here more from

'yrs truly

'C. HEAVILAND.'

'So you do really know that girl's whereabouts?' said Hermia, with a searching glance at her brother.

'Confound it—yes!' he admitted, off the defensive.

'Then you lied to me a year ago?'

Perceiving he had put his foot in it, Elmsdale hung his head in confusion.

‘And you have been living with her ever since?’

He hung his head still lower, like the culprit he was.

‘Ralph, you’re impossible! Will you never settle down? How can you hope to be respected if you will go on forming degrading connections to trammel you all your life long. . . . Marriage, now, with some good girl’—she meditated—‘like Joan Calderon——’

An interruptive and unmistakable chuckle belied the contrite pose of the wrongdoer. Hermia stared at him. Then in a shocked voice,

‘Well, Elmsdale,’ she said conclusively, ‘I think you might draw the line somewhere. Only the utterly depraved make a mock of goodness.’

She left off lecturing him, however, and said:

‘You hurt Bennet’s feelings just now by swearing at him in a most ungentlemanlike way——’

‘Five bob’ll square that!’ retorted her brother cynically. ‘I couldn’t help it, I tell you; I was so devilish upset with getting this impudent serawl. And there he stood waiting with the tray, and saying “Will there be any answer, m’ lord?”—I couldn’t help flaring. . . . Scandalised poor Stoke, I did, and scared young Land so that he swallowed a cigarette.’

Regarding the note he still held, she said pointedly:

‘You will answer it, I presume.’

‘I’ll see myself d—d first!’ replied his lordship. ‘I shall stop for the blow-out to-morrow night, and then I shall shunt—scoot—skidaddle—clear out—call it what you like!’

His sister sneered: ‘It sounds rather cowardly.’

‘Yes, don’t it?’ said Elmsdale, unabashed; and with that he left her.

CHAPTER XXVII

IN THE BALL-ROOM

It seemed to Enid as if time had suddenly flowed back when Hugh Calderon approached her in an oak-panelled ball-room bright with constellations of candles. A fire burned now in the grate beneath each sculptured mantelpiece, which then had been masked in flowers; that, with the decorations of holly and mistletoe, was the only difference from the former scene this so closely recalled.

'I'm almost afraid—' he began, with eyes at once supplicating and trustful. Without a word she gave him her programme. It was like giving herself, she thought, with a little suffusion, and hoped he did not perceive the analogy. It was the first time she had yielded him anything. He too found the action of fathomless significance.

Old Simon espied them afar off and came fussing up to them.

'So you two have come to an understanding—a *modus vivendi* as the newspapers say. Do you know it was owing to you, Mr. Calderon, or at any rate to her tantrum with you, that she distinguished herself by running away with the man who's now her husband? It's you she has to thank for present happiness, so it's right you should be friends. Ha ha! . . . Eh, Sidney, my boy? I was just saying . . .'

Enchanted with a reminiscence which linked the Calderons to the Glovers, he moved on to impart the same to Boyne, who was preparing to waltz with the eldest Miss Vellum. Enid and Hugh stood abashed before each other. It was not until he had bowed and retired that Enid, left staring at her programme, saw that he had entered his name for four dances. It was abominable of him—a mean advantage to

take of her embarrassment. She resolved to grant him but the orthodox two.

She was unconscious of looking her best till she caught Sidney's eyes gloating on her with unmistakable pride of possession.

The truth was, she felt excited and anxious, in a state of extreme nervous tension. Her eyes seldom quitted her stepmother, following her through all the shifting combinations of the dance.

How brave she was! Had Enid not herself read the note that told of the horrible man's return, she could have thought it a bad dream from which she was awakening. It had the texture of dreams, a certain looseness and inconsequence, an improbability unlike the well-knit homespun of real life. What she had learnt in Hermia's dressing-room two hours before endowed her vision with a strange duality. She beheld a farce within a tragedy and, an actor in both, was still a spectator, like one bereft of that happy blindness to the wider issues, one of life's conditions, which is life's great palliative.

'How can she keep it up!' was her thought of Hermia, as she marked her stepmother's perfect demeanour as hostess. Two hours ago it had seemed as if nothing could ever be the same again, as though the impress of despair could never again disappear from Hermia's face. Yet here she was smiling and talking with her accustomed suavity, with no trace either of depression or of the febrile excitement which it sometimes exhales.

For the time being Enid lived in Hermia. It was but a wraith of her which revolved in the clasp of a partner, or chatted over a glass of wine and a plate of trifle in the large hall disposed as a lounge. Her partners were all alike phantom-like and fleeting until it came to Hugh, with whom she regained her identity for a little while.

He spoke little, though she was all ears; whereas her former partners had prattled unceasingly and she had scarcely heard. Perhaps he guessed she did not want to

talk, that it was sufficient to be close to him, wafted on by the music, swaying with its rhythm. He might hope that, but not take it for granted. He was very masterful, she knew; and must learn that she was in like manner independent.

Drowsily speculative in her enjoyment of the languid waltz, she wondered if it was very wicked to cherish so high a regard for a man not one's husband. Knowledge of Hermia's dilemma made her incredulous of the mighty sanctity of marriage. It seemed a kind of springe. And then, over Hugh's shoulder which her eyes just topped, she caught sight of Sidney watching their orbit with disfavour. Poor Sidney! Why wasn't he dancing? Did he suspect anything? Was he jealous?—How silly of him! She sent him a smile meant to reassure.

Hugh's eyes, studying her hair, were as contented and unroving as pastured kine. In the moment of shadow it was a cloud with errant wisps burning golden along the contour. Anon it was seen in intricate profusion, and the savage instinct arose to fondle and kiss it. Repressed perforce by the habits of good breeding, the desire gave him a complex, tantalising sense of restraint, of compression, a little ache which for pleasantness surpassed pure pleasure.

The gaze, once fixed on her, ran in a charmed circle of contemplation. Her nose, though satisfactorily prominent, was no excrescence. Conning her profile the eye was not arrested by it but lured on by nostrils sensitive as a thoroughbred's, to consider her lips and the curve of the chin which in its turn led on to a firm white neck and bust.

At length she looked full at him and, deeming her annoyed by his perusal, he glanced elsewhere. The breadth between her eyes and the clearness of the eyes themselves warranted her loyal by nature, and as fearless as himself.

With one short rest they danced together until the waltz-music ceased. The stop was like waking. They found themselves close by a fire-place, before which stood Hermia in conversation with Sir Charles Vellum and some seated dowagers.

Mrs. Glover asked: 'Have you seen Elmsdale anywhere?'

Hugh had heard him say he was going to steal a smoke, and offered to find him. But Hermia protested she had only asked out of curiosity.

Just then, in the hum of small-talk consequent on the fall of the music, Ruth and Freddy entered the ball-room. Forsaking her squire, Mrs. Stoke came forward alone. She made straight for Hermia. Enid read mischief in the poise of her sister's head, in the expression on her pretty dollish face.

A few minutes previously, Ruth and Freddy, wandering through the house at the latter's suggestion, 'for a lark,' had happened to look out of a staircase-window and admire the frosty brilliance of the stars.

'I say, what do you say to a turn in the garden?' said Freddy; and Ruth had sent him at once for a cloak and goloshes.

Their festive garb completely wrapped from sight, Ruth had taken the swain's arm, and they had strolled as far as a little iron gate admitting to the outer park, where Freddy had stood to light a cigarette.

'Servants slipped out to eanoodle while every one's thinkin' o' the dance,' thought to himself a person who had been kicking his heels thereabout for three blessed hours, hearkening to the muffled sound of fiddling, and in two minds about waiting any longer. So disgusted with the way he had been treated as to be careless who knew his errand, he accosted the male:

'Say, brother! Perhaps you won't mind goin' and tellin' the missus that I'm precious tired o' waitin'. Was to've met me here at six and now it's damned near ten, and a cold night too'—he stamped on the ground and slapped his chest like a coachman—'Give her the private tip to come at once. Say there's one out 'ere ain't quite a Job—not altogether! And if she won't come he can't say what'll happen—Tell her that. That'll fetch her.'

At the apparition of a man on the other side of the gate, a shape of indistinct outline springing, as it seemed, out of

the ground, Ruth had bounded and clutched Freddy's arm. Then followed silence of amazement at the man's style of address, which in its turn gave place to infinite curiosity. By adroit squeezing of her escort's arm, she managed to impose silence on him. When the person ceased speaking, she herself asked :

‘Which mistress do you mean?’

‘Why, Mrs. Glover—the Honourable!’

‘All right; I’ll tell her.’

‘Whisper it to ’er, my dear, if you don’t want to lose your place!’ had been the parting injunction sent after her as she pulled the irate Freddy back towards the house. He was boiling over at the affront of being taken for a menial; and knowledge that the fellow, whoever he might be, would now go away with that misconception, made him something warm in reproach of his lady-love for dragging him off ere he could vindicate himself. But Ruth only said, ‘Don’t be silly!’ and hurried him on, seeming much elated, he could not see why. Soon she volunteered :

‘The old cat is shown up at last, don’t you see, you great stupid? I always knew there was something shady about her, something underhand and sneaking. I felt it instinctively, you know, and I’m never wrong in my intuitions. Now we shall learn what it is, and papa and Enid will see for themselves.’

Freddy, though scared at being implicated in a family scandal concerning a lady of whom he stood deeply in awe, yet clung to his beloved with the helplessness of a parasite.

Ruth cast down her cloak on a chair in the garden-room, patted her hair and went to the ball-room, Freddy imitating all she did. She made straight for her stepmother with a travesty of the naïve wonder of a child who has lighted on a caterpillar or other marvel and would have all mankind raise eyes with her. Freddy, wellnigh stunned by the lights and the music coming after a succession of excitements, abode by the door and gaped after her.

‘There’s such an odd person wants to see you,’ she said,

advancing. 'Fred and I slipped out for a breath of fresh air, and there he was by the little gate into the park. It gave us such a start. And he asked for you. He told us to say that, if you did not go to him at once, he could not answer for what would happen! . . . Oh, have I said anything dreadful?' She shrank back a little, with hand to lips, in well-feigned dismay at the consternation painted on the surrounding faces.

Mercifully the orchestra, striking up a jiggy tune as prelude to a set of Lancers, made Ruth's speech inaudible save by a small group and diverted attention from the peculiar manner of her entry.

A young man, evidently in search of her, came up smiling and bowing. 'Our dance, I believe!'

'Oh, is it?'

Ruth gave herself indifferently. It was a sort of triumph to sail off naturally on a partner's arm while yet her mastery of the situation was unimpaired. It saved the invention of a retreat which might easily have been ungraceful.

Hermia's countenance was chiefly expressive of unbounded astonishment, a look reproduced on the faces of Sir Charles Vellum and Hugh Calderon and, with an addition of blankness, on the pursy faces of two old ladies, her more immediate neighbours. For Enid, who felt her stepmother's heart all the while, the moment was a martyrdom. She could have slain some one or swooned away, an odd brace of alternatives presented occasionally to even the strong among women. Unconscious of herself and him, she gripped Hugh's arm, the nearest stronghold; and Sidney, observant from a distance, found himself a-flame so that the bright room and its gliding crowd turned pale as a faded painting by comparison.

No one knew precisely what to say or do. It was a god-send to the little group that, just as Ruth sailed off with her claimant, Elmsdale should reappear on the scene. Hermia's face grew positively bright as he drew near at her beck.

'Ralph,' she said seriously, 'there is some man outside,

Ruth tells me, by the gate into the park. I think you had better go and see what he wants.'

'D——n the fellow! Why can't he leave me alone?'

His lordship's naturally rich complexion became scarlet. With an oath which set horror on the faces of the dowagers, he turned on his heel and fled to the other end of the room, dodging past couples.

So deftly and unhesitatingly had Hermia dropped the blind that Sir Charles Vellum had no doubt but that Elmsdale was being harried by some dun or other, and the tradesman was trying to recover his debt by putting to shame his lordship's sister, of whose rich marriage Ralph had doubtless bragged after the manner of men who live on credit. It was quite in keeping with the character rumour gave of his lordship.

Enid was merely puzzled, still shaken from the encounter. Pleading a slight faintness she asked Hugh to lead her to the refreshment-room. In the way thither she had to excuse herself to a youth who hurried up eager to assert his claim on her for the next dance.

'I hope I haven't hurt his feelings,' she murmured laughingly to Hugh.

'Oh, it's only young Halberd, a schoolboy!' said Hugh, as if schoolboys were made expressly for disappointment—an implication Enid disputed for something to say, while he maintained it for the same reason; he had but contrasted the chagrin of Jack Halberd with what his own riper feelings would have been in the same circumstances.

They selected a nook in the great entrance-hall which had an old English look with its deep glowing hearth, red-tiled floor, spread with dull green mats, and the dark beams overhead which made the really lofty ceiling seem low. It called up the days when good cheer was a hale old giant, not a dainty invalid.

The little tables, however, among which moved discreet serving-men, hard to distinguish from the guests, were eminently of the latter days, though subjugated by the

genius of the rare old hall. Comparative shade, and the homeliness of the dominant firelight, made the place refreshing after the dazzling ball-room. At the moment when Enid and Hugh chose seats, it was almost empty.

Enid asked for a glass of champagne and a biscuit, and was sipping the former when her stepmother joined them. Her stately figure, clad in dark brocade, completed the antique room as the stamen its flower.

Her composure was perfect. On Calderon rising to go, she objected by a regal gesture which conferred honour where it was addressed. It admitted him her equal and confidant; and that, in the woman's hour of toilette and beauty, when she shines imposing as a peacock in its pride, was as much as to acknowledge him a superior person. Enid felt this in a peculiar degree. The great anguish she knew Hermia to be suffering solemnised trifles. They three were together in conclave, colleagues, confederates. Hugh's ready admission to the secret raised him as high above the common herd as love itself could desire.

Hermia recalled her first unfortunate marriage to Hugh, who bowed his perfect remembrance of the episode. He seemed already to comprehend. So without further explanation she asked what was to be done, addressing herself to Enid. She could not herself go out to the man, yet, as his message had phrased it, who knew what might hang on her going?

'Since you honour me with your confidence,' said Hugh, after a moment's reflection, 'will you trust me a little further—I mean, to deal with the man in your stead? I have my own ideas. . . . Only, you will excuse my saying so, you must inform Mr. Glover of your trouble this very night. I believe the pair of you would be invulnerable. It is your shame the man is playing on. Obviously, he thinks you would sooner pay than tell. . . . By the garden-gate, I think you said?'

He had risen, and stood with one hand on the back of his chair.

‘There are at least three garden-gates ; you might mistake. I’m going with him,’ said Enid, rising also.

Hermia hesitated. ‘He may be gone.’

‘You might be very useful,’ said Calderon, regarding Enid.

Hermia rose in her turn. ‘It’s a mad idea,’ she said; adding, for the ears of a servant drawing near: ‘But it really is a lovely starlight night. Mind and wrap up well, that’s all. You’ll find my fur-cloak in the garden-room, if you care to take it.’

As she turned from gazing after the retreating couple, Mrs. Glover found herself face to face with Sidney, who was staring in the same direction. She read suspicion in his face, and, feeling that he was suffering through her fault, asked the favour of his arm as far as the ball-room. She did not wish him to follow her delegates as she judged he might have done if left to his own jealous promptings.

She showed him a reason for Enid’s sortie, a foreign aspect of the truth, enough light, she hoped, to dull the flame of jealousy. He was quite docile while she spoke to him, but no sooner had she entered into conversation with others than he slipped back to the hall where there were now more people and a little babel of chatter, the orchestra playing an unpopular dance. Near the table on which Enid had sat, down on the deep-red tiles, lay two roses, a swart red and a white, with their leaves. They must have dropped from her bosom as she got up. Their colours assorted wonderfully with that of the pavement. Sidney, susceptible to harmonies of that kind, saw something mystic in their lying there. It seemed a shame to pick them up. But they were treasure-trove for him, as was every trifle of Enid’s: favours rescued from some one else. Having gathered them, he walked back towards the ball-room as if fulfilling the behest of some fair one ; but in the passage he stuffed them into the inward pocket of his coat.

A savage longing to macerate himself, the crude human instinct when an adored face frowns or is averted, made him wish them next his skin that he might feel the thorns at every breath.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A PLAY OF DOUBLE MEANING, FOLLOWED BY
A SLEEPLESS NIGHT

THE man was gone.

Enid could hardly believe the ordeal over. She held Mr. Calderon's arm as they stood by the garden-gate, immersed in the earth-gloom and dim one to another. The sky above was pale with a greenish tinge, the stars a-glitter like the mica in granite.

The man had slunk off muttering, leaving them the field; and to avoid the least semblance of haste unbecoming the conqueror, they waited in the same attitude until his form and the creak of his boots were swallowed up in the gloom and whisper of a long glade.

Her consent to Hugh's manœuvres and giving herself up to his purposes had wrought a kind of fusion of their entities. They thought the same thoughts, were conscious of that communion, and conversed intimately without speaking. When at last they bestirred themselves it was of one accord.

The groan of violins, heard with the slight rustle of a wind in the evergreens and its sighing amid the great old timber in the park before them, where their eyes found no certainty in the darkness, made together a strange solemn music like the pianissimo of a grand organ. Under influence of that music, her thoughts afloat like halcyons on a smooth sea of enchantment, it was with an effort that Enid controlled her mind to definite consideration of Hugh's words when he finally spoke.

'I think we've settled him. But I had rather Mrs. Glover

did not know the exact nature of the stratagem employed. And you can see for yourself how important it is that she should tell your father the whole history at once. If she does not, I fancy from what we have seen to-night that some one else will.'

A vision of Ruth's face in the ball-room made his argument cogent with Enid.

They came out of the shrubberies on to the smooth lawn which lay beyond them like the shorn edge of a fleece, and crossed to the house. In the hall he asked permission to quit her. He wanted to smoke a cigar.

His parting words were spoken in an undertone, for there were several couples taking refreshment in the hall and more than one pair of eyes was fixed on them.

'I hope we've saved the situation.'

'We! You perhaps.'

'I could have done nothing without you.'

And as she walked on to the ball-room she felt that was true. He could not have done it without her. She had known herself his complement all the while.

But how intimate it had made them! Without one word, one look, or the least pressure of the hand, they had grown more intimate than the oldest friends.

How well he had played the part of an angry husband! She was not sure whether it had been very good or very wicked of him to think of it, of her to connive at it. Her rôle had been entirely passive. It had not required of her to speak or move, but only to stand beside him holding his arm. Yet it was the leading part. If blame attached to either of them, it belonged to her. Together they had routed the blackmailer who had taken her for Hermia, the disputed wife. He had put her in front of him so that the man had come forward, supposing her alone. The man had started swearing when Hugh stepped up and took the direction of affairs.

'This lady has given me the right to protect her; kindly address yourself to me!' she could hear him saying. And

it was plain that this privy of the husband to the matter disconcerted their opponent. His response had been a growl. 'You will perhaps not object to my detaining you until we have proof that you are the person you claim to be, and also some information as to your way of life. I conclude, from your coming forward like this in the cause of the law, that you will be willing to afford me every facility?'

At this point had come the gruff answer, not without its note of conciliation.

'I'm a poor man, and claim but my rights, Hermia. . . .'

'Kindly confine your attention to me!'

'Well then, look 'ere! I don't wish to spoil your 'oney-moon, squire, nor yet to give a bit more trouble than is necessary for what I call my comforts. It'll come a sight cheaper for you to allow me something so long as I live, which won't be very long if I keep such hours as this on winter nights. . . .' He gave a sepulchral cough, most hopeful for his speedy demise.

'There should be a man of mine within call,' Hugh had observed, as one talking to himself. 'To take the rascal in charge now will save some months of detective work . . . look here now, friend! . . .'

He again spoke openly to Garland, who was already beginning to edge off with an effort to save appearances.

'We have a party here to-night, and I would rather not have my guests disturbed by any scandal. Take yourself off now, and you will have a start till to-morrow when I shall set my lawyer to work. Stay here another five minutes and I'll chance the scandal, have you taken indoors and locked up. The fact that you are trespassing, and your infamous attempt to levy blackmail, amply justify my taking such a step.'

It was a capital piece of acting, and Enid recognised with mixed shame and delight that she had counted for much in the success of its delivery. Had he not all the while been thinking of her, he could never have put such conviction, such fervour, into his acceptance of a part and utterance of

a sentiment so completely foreign to the experience of his bachelor life. He had spoken to her as successfully as to the rogue. This two-edged quality of his speech was what made it thrill in her memory.

‘Oh, I say, Mrs. Boyne! . . . Where have you been all this time? You’re awfully hard on a fellow!’ A partner darted to claim her as she paused in the doorway.

Seeing one or two more hurrying up in perspective, she allowed the claim and floated off in the quasi-embrace of the callow, red-haired youth who had first espied her.

Whirled past her stepmother, she gave a glad smile which awoke the shadow of itself on Hermia’s still face.

Mrs. Glover stood that night for a statue of hospitality, benignant, kindly, dignified, but motionless. The strain had left her facial control while depriving her of all animation.

It was three in the morning ere Enid entered her bedroom. Sidney was there before her. The door of his dressing-room stood open, and she could hear him throwing things down and sighing consumedly. Knowing this signified a jealous need to be coaxed, and in no mood for hypocrisy, she did not heed the noises in the next room.

Sitting before the looking-glass she began to brush out her hair, a work of preening which she rather liked, but performed seldom, owing to her possession of a maid. She had not the least intention of going to bed that night.

Presently Sidney came in, announcing in a surly tone that he was sleepy. He objected to the flare of candles which the mirror flashed back on to the pillow where his head would lie. Enid submissively blew them out and, drawing her chair to the fire-side, shovelled on more coals. With feet on the fender she sat looking at the flicker which set a monstrous shadow of her leaping on the wall behind.

For a while all was still, till Sidney turned over in bed with a fretful gasp which was followed shortly by a groan accompanied with further tossing. Enid would not ask what ailed him. She had too often let herself be caught by such by-play. To-night she felt strong, of adamant. In-

different to his behaviour, she lay back in her easy-chair, and Sidney was obliged to formulate his grievance—a thing he was slow to do. But speech came at last, when she replied to all his questions politely, if a trifle listlessly.

Why had she kept him in the dark about the Garland trouble? Why, when it came to the point, had she chosen Mr. Calderon for confidant rather than her husband? How often had she met the said Calderon; and did she expect him (Sidney) to be pleased with the slights she had lately put upon him? By the time she had replied to all this, and had lowered his tone from the bitterly jealous to the merely querulous, there was a stir in the house, and a little greyness stole round the edge of the window-curtains to tell that the winter's dawn was up.

A confused noise of cocks crowing came out of the distance. The sighing of a light wind through frosty twigs was musical and shivery as though it played with fine filaments of glass. Presently the same breeze bore the burden of church-bells. The Ditchley ringers were out betimes.

Enid, in the abstraction which characterised all her tussles with Sidney, pictured them in the dim grey church, a candle stuck in a niche of the tower to light their doings; they stamped on the pavement and blew their nails ere grasping the ropes. All the while she kept talking to Sidney, the bells moaned to her, reciting her life and deeds.

It was Christmas morning.

CHAPTER XXIX

A FIT OF REPENTANCE FOLLOWING AN OUTBURST

ENTERING the breakfast-room that Christmas morning, Ruth looked at her stepmother and saw her beaming. Her father, on the other hand, was grave, though not morose. Something had passed between them for good. Even Kenneth, who had no more inkling of the truth than has the chance gazer on a smooth face of water of currents at strife beneath, sniffed new clarity of the social atmosphere and was thankful. He took the comfortable feeling for a token that the obnoxious Frederick was about to depart.

But it was Lord Elmsdale who, after glancing at a letter, announced his departure as for that afternoon irrevocably. He asked :

‘Does any one know how the trains run?’ adding, while every one looked astonished: ‘Same as Sundays, I suppose. . . . Devilish nuisance. . . . Urgent business. . . . Um—m—m.’ And he mumbled off into silence, mounting colours of confusion.

‘Why, what on earth can call you away on Christmas Day? There’s no business doing anywhere!’ called out the irrepressible Freddy from further down the table.

Elmsdale shot a subtle glance at the speaker—a glance between savagery and amusement—and helped himself to another boiled egg.

‘Well, I must remember to order the carriage; what time do you want it?’ said Hermia, who saw further into her brother’s motives than did the rest of the company.

‘Isn’t it rather cowardly to run away?’ she whispered to

him later when, herself dressed for church, she met him coming in from the garden in an ulster very much like a dressing-gown, with a checked cap slouched over his eyes and a pipe in his mouth. 'What a disreputable creature you look !'

But his lordship was averse to parley. With a fretful 'Oh, hang it !' he shed his overcoat and quickened step to the smoking-room.

She called after him : 'The landau will be taking Enid and Sidney home at four o'clock ; it can take you on to the station.'

'That'll do nicely,' he sang out from the passage of his retreat.

Hermia and Enid walked to church together ; Simon Glover having set apart the morning for a dreaded explanation with Ruth who was already closeted with him. Kenneth had stated his intention of accompanying them, but at the moment of starting was nowhere to be found. Lord Elmsdale was relieving his pent-up feelings by metaphorically kicking Freddy Land as they sat together in the smoking-room—quarrelling, that is to say, with all his utterances, and finding a grim satisfaction in making him knuckle under.

Freddy's fawning love of a lord, though masked in jaunty airs of comradeship, made him an admirable safety-valve for an ill-humour that craved something to bully. He was better than a dog, to use the words of the viscount himself, who had a soft corner in his heart for dogs, as indeed for every creature he felt it his duty occasionally to thrash.

The two women exchanged few words on the outward walk ; and those relating to the landscape through which they moved in a direction counter to the glide of drab clouds over the purple country. A few sea-gulls driven by stress of weather to seek food inland, wheeled over the stiff furrows among the leafless hedges, their whiteness akin to that of Ditchley windmill creet and motionless in the midst of storm-tints.

At setting out there had been some debate as to the need of umbrellas.

‘Against snow?’ Enid had asked derisively.

‘To protect hats,’ Hermia had said, taking one large enough to shelter them both upon emergency.

They were glad of this when, coming out of church, they found a congestion of worshippers in the porch and beheld through the low arch the air full of snow-flakes. Way being made for their furs by the crowd in stuff and broadcloth, Hermia put up the umbrella, tucked Enid’s arm in hers, and they took the field path to the Abbey.

Through the snowfall earth and sky seemed of chalcedony, while forms of trees and hedges, half obliterated, loomed faintly violet like things entombed in the heart of a cloudy gem.

Sharing the umbrella entailed a proximity too close to permit of the silence in which they had traversed the same ways an hour before.

‘You are not looking well,’ said Hermia, squeezing her companion’s arm.

‘I dare say not; I had a bad night.’

‘All on my account, I’m afraid. I saw Sidney was hurt at your walking off like that with Mr. Calderon, and I did my best to smooth matters at the time. As if he had cause to be jealous!’

‘He has.’

‘Enid!’

‘I mean I much prefer Mr. Calderon to my lawful husband.’ Enid strove to dilute with some sarcasm a pronouncement she felt to be vile.

‘But I thought you were happy together!’

‘I’m glad you thought that. It’s a tribute to our acting—or at least to mine.’

Hermia’s impulse was to stand stockstill; but to stop in such a snowstorm would have been ridiculous, so they hurried on in silence. Enid’s rebellious thoughts having once found vent, were only gathering strength for a wider outbreak.

'I suppose it's wicked,' she presently began; and, gaining vehemence as she spoke, 'I sometimes feel as if it couldn't last, and yet I know it must—as if I couldn't bear it a day longer! He means to be kind, and he's fond of me, idiotically fond; that's the worst of it. It reminds me of a punishment I have read about somewhere, when a woman—or was it a man?—was tied up in a sack with an ape and some other animal and left to die. The creatures did not mean to hurt each other; it was the fault of their position, of the natural struggle for breath, for life.'

'For shame, Enid! I can't let you talk like this! You're not in earnest. Let's change the subject!'

She went on relentlessly:

'I sometimes dream that I am in the sea and something drags me under and prevents my swimming. Or else I'm sinking in a quagmire: the mud comes up to my neck, up to my mouth. And then, in trying to scream I wake up, and there's Sidney——'

Hermia broke in: 'But, my dear, this is pure madness. It comes, I suspect, of your having had no sleep since the excitement of last night. Besides it is very selfish madness. Just compare your position with mine at the present minute! Your father is going to have counsel's advice, and take steps to get our marriage legalised if possible. But I'm not his wife. Legally and religiously, I belong to that beast. . . . O Enid, just think of the millions who would exchange their life for yours with all its drawbacks, real or imagined; think of women wearing life away in the awful struggle to make both ends meet! Look at any real trouble, and you will see yours what it really is—the fancy of a girl with a taste for self-torture, whose lazy life gives her too much time to think about herself. You always were egotistical. A socialist would call you bloated, overfed. . . .'

'Thank you,' Enid interrupted with twinkling eyes. She even pouted a little. 'I plead guilty to some selfishness. But I've changed since I married. Now I'm only selfish in big things. But "bloated"! . . . But "overfed"! . . .'

She could not long maintain her defiant attitude under Hermia's scathing search into motives. Her stepmother took her to task for her harshness towards a man whose worst fault was his being a little too kind and submissive to her. A creature all sentiment was sure to grow morbid under the treatment to which she was subjecting him. Stricken by some of her sentences, and by a glimpse of herself as torturer, Enid let her head droop.

'I think you're a marvellously brave woman,' she said as, amid whirling snowflakes, they crossed the lawn, all dusty-white like a miller's coat.

'Well, I must say you are rather a cowardly one,' replied her stepmother with a friendly smile.

'I will try—Oh, I will, really!' whispered Enid in her earnest child-voice.

At dinner Ruth was subdued, thoroughly scared by her father's disclosure, like an appearance of the devil in place of a familiar imp invoked. She had dreamed of some slight scandal of debts unpaid; and instead, she found the whole house undermined, the family name in jeopardy. Freddy's sallies passed unheeded of her, till that sprightly youth himself began to have an inkling that they were unwelcome, which only made him sillier. Kenneth, observing them over the cruets, held private rejoicings.

Enid, resolved on amendment, made herself agreeable to Sidney.

The Christmas dinner was served at two o'clock in order that the servants might dine afterwards and enjoy a free evening. At a few minutes past four Enid and Sidney drove away in the carriage with Lord Elmsdale.

His lordship was not talkative, though from time to time making an observation as if to show that his silence arose from no ill-feeling. As they passed by Ditchley mill and some scattered cottages with lighted windows—black shapes with white roofs, standing in a whitish land like powdered negroes—he sat well back in his corner. The snow made a ground-light inverting the natural order of shades so that

he earth was paler than the sky. Once clear of the home parish my lord brisked up considerably, trying as it seemed to make up for what had been unsociable in his recent demeanour.

Enid could never traverse Ditchley without thinking of Lottie. She fell a-wondering if Lord Elmsdale sitting opposite to her at that minute, and chuckling innocently over some schoolboy joke, could be indeed the seducer. In face of the wellnigh offensive honesty of his lordship's looks and utterance, it seemed impossible that he could have kept up the deceit so long. But then, as *Hermia* said, one never knew.

CHAPTER XXX

PRIDE AND BLUE BLOOD HAVE A FALL

CHRISTMAS HEAVILAND's monomania was derided in Ditchley, at first good-humouredly, but afterwards, when Lottie's slip had become ancient history, with a growing exasperation. Why couldn't he let the matter drop, shrug shoulders and resign himself like a man?

The probable gentility of the lover, the point which rankled most in his breast, was to other men's minds a clear alleviation. Will Heaviland, the girl's father, saw it so; and why should a brother's feelings outstrip a father's?

His now habitual scowl caused him to be shunned by fellow-labourers, whether at his daily work on the farm or in the Sunday loungings by hedge-sides. People shook heads over him as one on the downward road. The blacksmith, who had always backed him as a good understanding lad who might do well for himself, washed hands of him now, owing to disappointment.

'Twere all very well while the thing were fresh in our ears, like'—it was the smith's modest use to fasten the suffix 'like' on to any phrase or word which struck him as having the golden ring of a quotation—'I was right sorry for the chap them farst days, as yow can mind together. But to bear malice and hatred like this here, the way we ha' all on us heerd un speak agen a gen'l'm'n what he ha'n't never set eyes on, and all account of a pretty gel goin' the way o' all flesh like. . . . Why, I don't agree wi' such goin's-on and I ha' bidden him mind and not speak so here in my forge, where if folks come 'tis to fare sociable. . . . 'Tis a shame

and disgrace to the parish. He'll be parson's wark I'm thinkin', neighbours; 'tis for the Reverend to speak tew un.'

And the smith who, when wielding a big hammer, with his huge grimed arms and leather apron, and the play of flames about him, might have stood for Vulcan himself, if not Satan, would pause to jerk his head towards the open daylight with a reference, perceptible to his audience, to church and parsonage. And they all agreed with him. Something in Chris Heaviland needed exorcising. He was past mortal remedies and called for priestly intervention.

'Tis arter all but like flyin' to like, as you may say,' the blacksmith remarked once, lifting a pair of damp arms as brawny as Samson's to precipitate a yawn. 'There be more'n a drop o' what they call the blew blood in them there Heavilands, though the young uns don't know on't. Their grandfather were knowed for a come-by-chance o' t' old lord up at t' Abbey.'

'Ah, and so I ha' heerd say,' came in chorus from loungers in the wide doorway.

'Tis that what made poor dear Lottie such a high up-lookin' gel as no one in the place weren't good enow for har to walk out with. And I b'lieve as it's the starrin' o' this here same blew blood, as they call it, make poor Chris take on so. Blewness, that's pride, I reckon; whereby redness dew allus stand for warmth and comfort. He feel that as a slight on his respectability'—the smith strained after a simile—'like a splosh o' old muck i' yer charchgoin' face of a Sunday.'

This tradition of a noble origin for the Heavilands took the fancy of Ditchley. It was bandied from mouth to mouth like the titbit at a feast of cannibals; and was held to explain the vein of oddity in Chris and his sister, but especially in Chris, which was so offensive to plain folks.

As for Christmas himself he never heard the legend until one January day when employed in bush-draining a field on the upland, called California for remoteness from the farmstead.

His partner at the job, one of the dirtiest going, was a

certain Tom, his familiar enemy, and rival for the favours of Victoria the maid at the farm. They worked together, smoking clay pipes unremittingly, Tom teasing Chris about his one idea, till at last young Heaviland struck the flat of his spade deftly on a pat of mud, bespattering his comrade. Tom let fall the bushes he was holding and, catching up a pick which lay near, lifted it to dash out his insulter's brains. Chris had his spade raised with a like intent. Equally prepared, the sight of each daunted other. Above them the sky bellied like wet canvas; a few rooks flew cawing; hollies in the wintry hedge had a funereal look. The lone place was too deplorably suggestive of inanition for men to court that condition lightly there. With one accord they lowered their respective implements and fell to work once more.

Said Tom warningly, but without provocation: 'Yow'd best mind what yow be at, young man.'

'Dew yow mind then and not rile me!' said Chris, in the same tone.

'Yow fare that almighty easy to rile. But there, I suppose 'tis account o' that there blue blood o' yourn folks talk about. Not but what I ha' seed the colour o' your blood different times, and 'tis red same as mine. But I guess the meanin' don't lie on the sarface, yow'll ha' to dig for't.'

'What a fool yow be, Tom! What in this here mortal arth be yow a-pratin' on?'

'Wa, don't yow know as your grandfather were a bastard o' t' old lordship what lived up at t' Abbey years ago, well nigh time that were a monkery?'

'Lor' love ye, no, Tom!' Chris had lost all anger. 'Hew the devil told ye that?'

'Wa, no one partickler; 'tis all about as yow together got blew blood i' your veins.'

'Well, this here's the farst I heerd on ut.'

'Yow niver mean that?'

'I dew.'

In spite of the thick gloves both wore, the work was

freezing cold, as if the mud they trod and handled had been ice-cream of a coffee-colour. They had often to stop and slap their hands together to restore the circulation.

They stood down in a trench, strewing and bestowing the bushes which were to hold up the soil so as to leave channels for drainage through the ensuing year. When the shadows grew and it was time to knock off work, they scraped the outer mud from their clothing, shouldered their instruments and trudged back to the homestead, following hedgerows. As they entered the rickyard, the cowman flung a jest at their earthy appearance and the farmer, coming out of a barn, bade them go to the kitchen for a glass of something hot, the guerdon of such work on such a day. Both being aspirants to the hand of the servant, whose hall of audience the backhouse was, there was much rasping of boots on the scraper before entering, and subsequent wiping of them on a piece of sacking spread for the purpose.

‘Wa, Tom; what a figure of fun!’ cried the maid, raising hands and eyes. When Chris appeared as Tom’s pendant she burst out laughing. They were a pair of she-didn’t-know-what—mudlarks, burglars or something!

‘Stow that, my mawther, and gie us some water to wash in,’ said Chris gruffly.

‘Wa, whatever be amiss wi’ yow?’

‘Oh, don’t yow pay no regard to him, my dear!’ said Tom soothingly. ‘He ha’ fared that cranky all day as ’twere a pain to wark wi’ un. He be ollers a-dealin’ on revenge and that—things as be on-Christian.’

The maid, who never stood still to talk, was employed in drawing hot water from the boiler. She said:

‘’Tis high time yow did let bygones be bygones, Chris Heaviland!’

‘I ha’ the right to my own thoughts and feelin’s, I suppose!’ retorted Christmas, standing by while Tom dipped his face in the basin and rubbed it blindly with a slip of pale soap. ‘I ha’ the right to wish to find out what become on her. By what is said, I ha’ as good a right to

my feelin's as some what hold their heads higher. 'Cordin' to what is said, I ha' lord's blood in my veins, and so have she. Perhaps if I could see the chap and shew him that, he'd marry her; that's all I ax him for.'

'God forgie us!' cried Tom, blowing, like a grampus to get the soap and water out of his breathing-holes. 'Here be a noo toon on the old instrymment. And 'twas me what taught it un this very arternune. Wa, bo', that there blood yow tell on is but bastardy, and that fare as different to the right stuff as ditchwater to good drink.'

'Yow 'd best hold your tongue!' said Christmas threateningly. And Tom, peeping out of a great huckaback towel, and seeing danger signals, desisted with a pacific, 'There's ta soap, bo'!'

But not so Victoria.

'Yow be gone right silly about your sister, Chris Heaviland,' she remarked as she moved about the scullery. 'I ha'n't no patience with a man as ye may talk to pleasant by the hour, and he never look at ye and answer as if he didn't hear. I ain't used to be so treated. And all account of a light-conducted gel what ha' misbehaved herself as I never would—no, indeed—not with kings and judges!' Her voice broke a little, then grew softer—'I never knew a man take on so about a sister. If that had been a sweetheart now.'—Chris hung his head before the impeachment of neglect.—'The gel went her own way, didn't she? She weren't kidnapped nor anyways forced, now was she? Suppose yow was to find her, dew yow think as she 'd bless ye for interferin'? Wa, 'twould be like comin' betwixt man and wife! She 'd feel fit to scratch yer eyes out—I should, in her place; I know that!—and the gentleman and his friends 'd just sneer and scoff at ye—if they didn't give ye a hidin', that is—— Come, Chris, bo', be reasonable, dewee now!' She toyed bashfully with her apron. 'Wa, God bless me, 'tis like askin' a man to choose a-twixt meat and moonshine.'

Tom looked on between a gape and a frown. Chris, his

face in the towel, was about to make some protestation when the mistress entered the backhouse with the rum and water prescribed for the drainers. The farmer himself shortly entered from the yard, kicking his highlows against the wall outside ere resorting to the scraper ; and Chris lost the chance of vindicating himself. When, with touching of foreheads, the two men started for home, his eyes sought Vicky's with an appeal from under heavy brows ; and hers replied with a challenge, which warned him not to halt much longer between two opinions.

Tom and Chris walked the quarter of a mile to the village side by side ; not that they liked each other's company, but because neither of them had the strength of mind requisite to break the old habit of companionableness. Thus the body of friendship, like the martyr-king in the riddle, will oft-times walk and talk long after the soul's departure. This vice of habit compelled an interchange of 'Good-nights' when Chris turned in at his cottage-gate.

An elegant figure was seen flitting off in the dusk ahead of them.

'Hew be she?' Tom asked ; and Chris said, 'Blowed if I know' ; the surly tone of these remarks in odd contrast with their intrinsic amenity.

Having tramped round the brick-path, Chris was surprised on opening the door to find the backhouse deserted, though a fire roared in the bread-oven, and on baking days his mother was not wont to absent herself a minute from the scene of action. Hearing a murmur in the living-room, he called out :

'Be yow there together?'

'Ah, Chris bo' ! Come yow in !' came his father's voice in gladsome strain. 'There be great nooz—tamenjus ! Gel Lottie ha' been here and is but this minute gone from amongst us. I were wholly stammed to find her. Wunnerful nice she look, the real lady, and no mistake ! And she say as how that be all fair and square and she be married to the gen'l'm'n, so now yow ha'n't no fudder cause to onase

yerself—What dew yow stand and frown for when you did ought to fare joyful same as yer mother and me.'

'Did she tell ye the man's name?' asked Chris coolly.

'What? The good gen'l'm'n's? No, to be sure; I never thought o' axin'. I marn be waxin' soft, that's sarten sure!' said Will Heaviland apologetically, mystified and confused by his son's scorn of glad tidings.

'Nor yet the marriage lines what yow ha' the right to see. Yow didn't ax for that neither?'

'No, Chris bo'. I took my gel's ward for trewth same as I would yourn. We bain't liars, not as a fam'ly.'

'Well, I don't believe a ward on't. She be play-actin', that's my belief. 'Tis all her craft. Like enow she kind o' longed to see ye arter all this while, and not to have yow fussin' arter her, she made up this here tale o' bein' married. Well, I'm off arter her. I see which way she went as I tunned in at ta gate, though I hadn't no idea hew ta was.'

His father and mother, sitting helpless as folks spell-bound, raised a wail of expostulation which was at its height when Christmas slammed the gate behind him.

Beyond scattered lights of the village the night was dark, dense with mist and very cold. At the pace he took, cloudy shapes of trees kept emerging from the fog, grew hairy a moment, then sank again in the cloud. He wondered what on earth had possessed Lottie to choose that inclement evening for a visit so long deferred. She had not appeared to be walking fast when he and Tom got sight of her, and Chris counted on overtaking her ere she reached the cross-roads behind the mill where he thought it likely her lover waited with some conveyance.

The event justified his expectation in both respects. Just as he drew near to the cross-ways he saw a moving figure close ahead, rushed on and clutched his sister's arm. And, the next minute, in response to her scream, a burly shape grew out of the darkness, and with a suggestion of the professional wrestler plucked Chris off from her and laid him sprawling on his back under the hedge.

The pained cursing of her late assailant seemed to awake compunction in Lottie, for she murmured :

‘Is that you, Chris? Whatever made you grip me like that? . . . I believe it is my brother, dear!’

‘Pretty sort of brother!’ came in a gentleman’s voice scornfully. ‘Hi, you sir! Did I hurt you?’

Receiving an answer all oaths, he said : ‘Come on, little un, he’s all right. It’ll be a slight lesson to him, perhaps, that’s all’; and the pair were gone.

Christmas collecting his scattered limbs on the wayside grass heard a nag whinny, then the sound of wheels rolling off. Though far from disabled, he had not cared to follow. The futility of attempting to contend with that man of strength and science was palpable, in however righteous a cause.

When the tale of Lottie’s flying visit became known in Ditchley, it was agreed that the Heavilands were right to demand evidence of the alleged marriage. To seek proof of an assertion differed from prying or meddling, and the changed complexion which this difference put on the matter did Christmas good with his neighbours. Even his sweetheart found excuses for him.

CHAPTER XXXI

SIDNEY BOYNE'S MALADY DECLARES ITSELF

THAT eventful Christmas initiated a second honeymoon for Sidney. For a time his wife was all that a wife should be, and he could not know that she was acting a part to conscience. But her first headache brought on a quarrel, when disillusionment revived his jealousy. He saw the happiness of those few days as dust to blind him.

He had read of such duplicity ; and jealousy is proverbially credulous, with a relentless hold on trifles. Akin to love, like love it craves proof positive and, Midas-wise, has power to turn all things to what it craves, till life itself grows nauseous.

Dissimulation became an instinct in face of a suspected intrigue. During Enid's absence on a short visit to Ruth, he invented pretexts to call every day at the Hall, simply to ascertain that Calderon had not followed his wife to town.

Never robust, he now gave much thought to his health. Ashamed of his fragility he tried to work up his strength by daily exercises. Enid laughed at this belated attack of athleticism when a more experienced woman would have feared ; for the cult of health, whether by nation or individual, is the surest symptom of health's decay. The sentiment of rivalry, one tentacle of the passion feeding on him, fired him to surpass Calderon on his own ground of muscular perfection.

Confident that there was a commerce between his wife and the squire—a belief to which her delight in lonely walks gave colour—he was maddened by his inability to learn the

facts of their intercourse, by the sense of being kept in the dark. His impulse was to dog her steps in person. But he still had a few shreds left of dignity, and a little reflection assured him that he could hardly follow her unremarked. The strength of passion tore at scruples, but to depute a man to spy on her in cold blood smacked too much of traditional villainy.

He was almost in despair of ever getting at the truth when, in the stable-yard one morning, Miles offered himself.

For the part he had played in their love-story Sidney preferred his coachman to the other servants, and was in the habit of talking amicably with him.

That morning Miles was rubbing down a horse with the regulation hissing accompaniment. A pail clanked on the pavement as he moved it. Pigeons looked in and out of the dovecot on the coachhouse wall, and strutted about the yard pecking in the crannies between the bricks. Their cooing seemed a part of the misty sunshine.

He paused to touch his cap to the master, then went on with his work.

‘There’s a thing I’ve been wishin’ to say to you, sir,’ he presently observed with becoming diffidence, standing with one hand on the horse’s back; ‘and I hope you won’t think it too much liberty in a servant. There’s a lot o’ gipsies camped on St. Mary’s Green’—he flipped a fly off the horse’s neck—‘a very rough lot they be, as I hear. The lanes won’t be fit for a lady to walk alone—specially of an evenin’, I thought it right to speak to you, sir. No offence, I hope.’

‘On the contrary, I am very much obliged to you,’ said Sidney, with bright eyes intent on the ground. ‘I do not like to deprive your mistress of her walks which—er—she has been recommended to take—for her health. And I cannot always go with her. . . . It is rather annoying. . . . She would not care, I know, for the company of one of the maids.’

‘Well, there it is, sir,’ said Miles, setting to work again.

'The roads ain't hardly safe, that 's a fact—especially of an evenin'.'

Sidney appeared to ponder.

'If any one could follow her at a distance, just as a safe-guard, I should be more at ease about her—especially, as you say, in the evenings. But she would object to that, I know.'

'Bless you, sir, if you wished it, I could shadow her and she never know. At a place where I once lived there was a young lady crazed and they'd set one of us to watch her when she walked in the grounds. It was as much as yer place was worth if she caught sight of you. I've had experience of shadowin' people.'

'No, not shadow!' said Sidney, with a fastidious frown at the word. 'I should only ask you to follow her without intruding on her privacy—in fact, to secure that privacy. I should, of course, consider it in your wages.'

'Oh, don't mention that, sir!'

To Sidney, in his clearer moments, the pact seemed shameful, an abomination. When Enid smiled on him, he saw himself a devil laying snares for a child of light. Once he approached Miles with a view to releasing him from his secret duties.

'I—er—I think the lanes are quite safe now. The gipsies you spoke of have gone.'

'Ah, they've gone, sir; but there's quite a plague o' tramps these days—some very quecr customers, gardener was tellin' me. I think I'd best keep on a bit longer, sir.'

The coachman was a fiend constraining him, a personified vice, the incarnation of his meaner passions, or his only friend, following his moods. Their eyes hardly ever met now, but there was a bond between them, felt sometimes as a chain by Sidney.

During all this time Enid had not exchanged one word with Hugh unknown to her husband, beyond 'Good-morning' or 'Good-evening,' if he passed her on the road. Their visits to the Hall had lately become more frequent; one

expression of Sidney's malady being to seek occasions of observing her behaviour with his rival. Joan Calderon, suspiciously observant of the same couple, was not slow to guess his secret. She sounded him, without seeming to do so.

In May the death of an aunt who had appointed him her executor compelled Sidney to absent himself for a few days. On the second evening of her solitude, Enid was in the roadside garden watering thirsty flowers, when Hugh reined in his horse on the other side of the hedge.

'I hear you are all alone, Mrs. Boyne. Won't you come and dine with us one evening? My sister would be delighted. How will to-morrow suit you?'

'Oh, I'm quite happy, thank you,' said Enid, deriding his solicitude; 'not a bit lonely.'

'But do come! Joan is always glad to see you.'

'Well, she must invite me, you know,' said Enid with a spice of archness.

'Then that's settled. Good-evening!'

Hugh rode home luxuriously in the tan-coloured evening between hedges fragrant with hawthorn-bloom.

'I say, Joan! Just write and ask Mrs. Boyne to dine here to-morrow evening. She's all alone down at the White House,' he said to his sister, entering her boudoir booted and spurred from his ride. To his boundless amazement, she rose before him, a tragic statue of opposition. 'You must kill me first!' she seemed to say.

'You would ask that woman in her husband's absence—*en famille!* . . . Not while I'm here to keep house for you! Whatever are you thinking of? You'll be posting your name and hers on every field-gate next! I've kept silence long enough; it's like winking at crime; it's hateful, disgusting to me!'

She tried to sail past him out of the room, but he caught her by the shoulder, swinging her round to face him. His mouth wore an uglier look than she had ever seen there.

'Look here, Miss Joanie,' he said very deliberately; 'you good little women have strong imaginations which sometimes run away with you—I make allowance for that. But I'll have you know that "that woman" is very sacred indeed to me, that there is absolutely nothing between us beyond my admiration which I have never expressed to her in so many words. Such terms as "crime" and "disgusting" are very insulting in that connection; and allow me to say, they are quite unworthy of you, my little sister. I don't know you! . . . Kindly remember for the future that, in speaking of her, you speak of as good a woman as yourself.'

'I won't— Oh, I can't receive her like that!' murmured Joan. She fled in tears from the room.

'She's right,' said Hugh to himself when prosaic changing of clothes had somewhat cooled his wits. 'And I believe Mrs. Boyne knew how she'd take it.' He paused in tying his white neckbow to review their short talk over the garden-hedge. 'Women see a long way in some things. Well, I've made rather a fool of myself with the best intentions. I think I'll clear out for a day or two.'

He thought of Lowestoft, the nearest popular resort of any magnitude. As the greatest relief from the publicity of his life at Hamford, he liked to be alone in some fairly populous place. It was a remedy for care and boredom which he had tried more than once and found effective.

Enid, of course, received no invitation to dine at Hamford Hall while her husband was away; she had not expected one. The slight caused her no disappointment, only a little amusement when she pictured the scene which must have taken place between the brother and sister. She was surprised on the evening of Sidney's return when he asked pointedly, and with satirical interest, if she had been to the Hall in his absence.

'No; why do you ask that?' she replied warmly, scenting some meanness or other.

'Mr. Calderon invited you, but his sister did not second the invitation; I know all about it. Upon my word, madam,

it's not pleasant for a husband to hear news like that at his home-coming.'

His tone was so offensive that she got up from the table. 'Who told you that?'

'Never mind who told me. I say it is an unpleasant thing to hear. It reflects upon you, on the reputation you have made for yourself about here. I don't hear all that's said about you; only a whisper comes to me now and then.'

'Stop!' she said, '—unless you wish to say something quite irreparable. In a few hours' time you'll be sorry you spoke like this to me.'

'I must request you not to take any more lonely walks—for your own sake.'

'Oh, as you please!'

Enid shrugged her shoulders. Hearing a servant coming, she sat down again and composed her face.

The idea of his setting Miles, that detestable man, to watch her! She had no doubt of the spy's identity. It was an unpardonable outrage, an indelicacy never to be forgotten.

On the morrow she ordered out the carriage and drove to Ditchley Abbey where she confided a part of the story to Hermia, who as usual advised passivity. She believed Sidney to be out of health. Enid must bear with the humours of a sick man. Why not take him abroad for a time?

Enid was diverted for a while from ruminating her own trouble by what she heard of Hermia's. The opinion of a learned counsel had been anything but satisfactory. Small hope was given of a divorce from Garland who seemed to have completely disappeared. The barrister had as good as advised Mr. Glover to say nothing about it, to avoid publicity, and go on living his married life as before. Enid thought her father greatly aged when he came in and kissed her on the forehead. Hermia said he was worrying himself to death. A man of crass respectability, he was peculiarly sensitive to the shame of the slightest irregularity in his domestic relations. A day or two later, when she drove

again to the Abbey, Hermia, with a brighter face, informed her of her father's final determination to brazen the matter out. For weeks he had been weighing the cost of a separation; it was that which had made him wretched. Now, though liable to occasional qualms of conscience, he was much better. Enid could not pity either him or Hermia, her own plight seeming so much worse than theirs. The illegality of their union seemed to her the merest quibble, unworthy of a second thought.

Following Hermia's counsel, she proposed to Sidney that they should go away for a time. But far from welcoming the project, he repelled it petulantly. Hamford suited him perfectly, he declared. He was inclined to quarrel with her for being discontented after all his care for her comfort.

Thenceforth she only sought some way to separate from him without noisome scandal.

CHAPTER XXXII

BY THE SEA-SIDE

HUGH CALDERON, in the place of his retirement, lounged on the pier in sunshine and sea-breeze, and wished he had never left Hamford. Like a workman unemployed, he was crushed beneath the burden of hours.

Gusts sang in his ears; sails of fishing-smacks, wearing colours of dead leaves, glided in the harbour with an effect of scene-shifting, their hulls unseen from where he sat. The sea exulted in the wind and sky, rapturous as a goddess embraced. Purple shadows fled over tumbled plains of clouded amber melting to lucent green, a wash of colours which refreshed the eye.

A few men and women in yachting-caps trod the planks with a quarterdeck gait. Life in the watering-place was just beginning to bubble after the sealed-up stillness of the cloudy season.

Hugh saw himself doomed to loaf there for days; shame of an indecision, which his sister would be sure to attribute to the magnetism of Mrs. Boyne, precluding his return before the term he had set for himself.

Half-way down the pier, in the reading-room verandah, some elderly men sat poring over newspapers with judicial gravity. Hugh had passed them in his way out with a dole of pity for their absorption, when some one sang out: 'Hallo! Calderon! Ahoy!'

Turning smartly, he beheld a full red face beneath a straw hat garishly ribboned, and realised Lord Elmsdale in the expanse of grey flannel making towards him from the

verandah. The old gentlemen looked up from their journals, gazed over spectacles for a moment, then fell again to their reading.

'Who'd have thought of meeting you here?' was observed by both simultaneously. The solace of finding a crony in his banishment made Hugh cordial. He turned and walked seaward with his old schoolfellow, inquiring:

'What are you doing down here?'

Lord Elmsdale's face turned a scarlet mystery. He eyed the inquisitive one askance as if suspecting some hidden point in the question.

'I might ask you the same thing.'

'True,' Hugh laughed. 'Well, come and have lunch with me if you've nothing else to do! I'm all alone.'

The simple invitation seemed complex to Elmsdale, who approached it gingerly as a dog nosing a hedgehog. It appeared both to fascinate and scare him. He looked dizzy, and incidentally wiped his forehead with a handkerchief; coughed and gazed at the pale horizon on which the trail of smoke from a passing collier hung like an eyebrow.

'You might take pity on me,' Hugh persisted. 'As I tell you, I'm all alone.'

Lord Elmsdale, still watchful of the far-off sea-line, faltered in desperation: 'Well—er—the fact is, I'm not.'

'Oho!' said Hugh, between a laugh and a sneer. 'I thought there must be some attraction to draw you so far from Epsom Downs in Derby week.'

'It's not what you think,' said Elmsdale huffily. 'I'm not the man I was, Hughie. I've changed for the better.'

'I don't see how,' said Hugh, laughing out. 'It's the same old game, I suppose, an infatuation for some woman or other?'

'By Gad, though, I won't stand that! I won't hear her called a woman. She's—she's a——' Here words failed

him, or discretion tardily intervened, and he tried vainly to insert his cane between the planks.

‘Remember, I have not had the honour . . .’

‘Well then, shut up!’

Hugh, ignoring his friend’s temper, affected to treat the passage as so much banter. Until they reached the pier-head, Elmsdale kept silence, gnawing his lips. Then, as they rounded the lighthouse and again faced the staring town, lined up along the beach as if to watch a pageant, he said impulsively :

‘The fact is, Hughie : she’s not a woman, she’s an angel. Blow me if she isn’t!’

Unwilling to vex him again, Hugh made no remark.

‘I may as well tell you all about it. You count for something in the story.’

‘I!’

‘Yes, you. Do you remember my talking to you more than a year ago—when I was down for Enid Glover’s wedding—about a girl?’ Hugh nodded. ‘Well, I took your advice, old chap; I married her: God bless you for it!’

In the joy of his disburthenment he held out his hand to Calderon, who took it less estatically, aghast at the responsibility, so warmly thrust upon him, of an ill-considered and probably scandalous union. Tears stood in Elmsdale’s eyes; and Hugh, dreading an emotional scene, said in the driest of tones :

‘I must congratulate you, then. When did the ceremony take place?’

‘The week after you advised me, old chap. Directly I got to town, I got a licence and fixed it up.’

‘I’m sure I never recommended anything so hasty.’

‘We’re keeping it quiet, lying low for a bit. It’s her wish: I would have had it known from the first; I’m not ashamed of her, I can tell you! . . . But she wanted to educate herself up, to get ready for her new position so as—’ his lordship blew his nose like a trumpet—‘so as to be

worthy of me—me! Did you ever hear such a thing? By Gum, Hughie, she's more than human, she's divine! If you'd seen the way she handled me—kept me at a distance till she'd fairly hooked me, and then made me the happiest man on earth; by Gosh, it was immense!'

Hugh pulled out his watch, saying he must get back to lunch.

'No, no; you must lunch with me, you must come and see for yourself. She's waiting for me.'

Hugh's face expressed a measure of fastidiousness, Elmsdale's taste in women being far from his own.

Guessing the reason of his hesitation, Elmsdale blurted: 'I'll tell you what she was: she was a lady's maid, a decent girl always, and damned lady-like! You must have seen her; she used to wait on Enid Glover and was a great pet of hers.'

'The girl there was all the fuss about! You don't mean it?'

'Yes, that's who she was; but hang bygones! Do come to lunch and judge for yourself! I brought her down here for her health. It's the nearest we can go to her native air without much risk of getting found out.'

A grey, semi-detached house, with a French window opening on to a patch of sward separated from the parade by a low wall and iron railings, was designated by Elmsdale from afar. On the little lawn stood a hooded perambulator full of something white, and beside it, on a campstool, sat a nursemaid sewing.

'My son and heir!' said Elmsdale, as he clanged the gate.

'By Jove! I had no idea it was as bad as that!'

'Bad, do you call it? Good, say I! The more the merrier!'

'But at that rate you won't be able to keep the secret much longer.'

'Don't want to! We'll publish it just when she likes I think her training's about finished.'

A lady, clad in a loose morning-gown came to the open

window with some work in her hand. 'Come on, Ralph; lunch is quite ready.' Seeing a stranger, she showed a slight reluctance, not ungraceful.

'I've brought my old friend Calderon to see you. Hughie—my wife!'

'I'm afraid we've nothing nice to offer Mr. Calderon. If I'd only known!'

'Oh, he's willing to take pot-luck.'

'I'm ashamed to trouble Lady Elmsdale.'

Lottie blushed, looking aslant at the nursemaid. Elmsdale after a glance in the same quarter, whispered: 'We're Mr. and Mrs. Thaneson, remember! In the house here, after racking their brains to place me, they've set me down as a stock-jobber, so nurse tells us.'

Hypercritical of his hostess as Calderon was prepared to be, he could find nothing to cavil at in her behaviour. It was entirely ladylike, and fraught with a supple grace he had always thought incompatible with low origin. To sound the depth of her culture, and also because he wished to talk of Enid—

'I hear,' he said, 'that you are an old friend of my neighbour, Mrs. Boyne.'

'How I should love to see her!' was the eager response. Lottie's eyes grew appealing. 'You have seen her lately? Is she well and happy? Do please tell me about her!'

He gave a description of the lady's life as he knew it; and in return got a fuller account of Enid's elopement than he had ever before heard, including his own unwitting part in that transaction. So absorbed did he become that Elmsdale had to call him to order. There is a time for everything; that was the time for ladies to retire that men might speak about them. No sooner was his wife ensconced in a deck-chair on the grass-plot, within hail through the open window though out of carshot, than he broke out:

'Isn't she a brick now? Isn't she splendid? Come, Hughie, what d'ye think of her? Ain't I a lucky dog?'

‘Yes, I think you are,’ Hugh bluntly confessed. ‘Does your sister know about it?’

‘Nobody knows, bar yourself and my lawyer!’

‘I should tell her if I were you . . .’

‘Oh, she has enough bother of her own; you know what I mean. I’ve talked to young Fairfax—you remember little Fairfax?—and he says there’s no way out of it, except bluff. Old Glover’s such a conscientious old devil, there’s the rub; but I think I’ve cleared his head of the idea of a separation. There’s no ground for one. The marriage was all square and above-board. We all believed the chap dead. . . . Now I was arguing with Fairfax that, if possession is nine points of the law, and we all know it is, any lawyer with half a cock-eye ought to be able to knock Garland out of time. Ten to one’s pretty long odds, you’ll admit. But Fairfax wouldn’t see it. There’s one thing, the brute seems to have quite disappeared—can’t be found anywhere. Wish he’d hanged himself!’ Lord Elmsdale closed the subject with a gulp of wine—‘No, I don’t feel like telling Hermia till it’s generally known. She’s such a worry-gizzard. It’d only upset her.’

‘On the contrary, I think she’d be relieved when she saw the lady.’

Elmsdale grasped his friend’s hand across the table.

‘Now that’s what I call a friendly thing to say. Thank you, Hughie. You always were a brick. I couldn’t have done better, now could I? She’s as much a lady as any of ’em, now isn’t she? I’m confoundedly pleased you like her.’

‘I know Mrs. Glover has been afraid you would do much worse for yourself,’ said Hugh, feeling it a matter of conscience to further elucidate his meaning which Elmsdale had somewhat mistaken.

‘Oh, ah!’ said his lordship, clouding a little. ‘Hang her, she always thought the worst of me—in that way; though I believe she’s fond of me. By George, Hughie, I believe the poor soul’s devilish devoted to me!’

Hugh stayed to tea, and on till the hour of twilight, grateful to Lottie for any detail vouchsafed of her former intimacy with Enid the maiden, as a dog for scraps from his mistress's table. His avidity was abject, albeit preserving the mien of unconcern. But women have the scent of a bloodhound on the track of love; when once they have inhaled love's perfume, all a man's dissembling cannot throw them off.

'I know where that man's heart is set,' said Lottie to her husband when Hugh had gone.

'That's more than I do,' was the rejoinder, 'though he's the best friend I've got.'

Hugh walked along the parade and up Kirkley Cliff where, on the height, he found a seat, and sat for a long while. The wind had dropped. Below him, away to the left, lights of the watering-place twinkled like mischief in the grey eye of evening. Anon the moon shone out, a perfect disc of gold, her rays foiled in haze so that she cast no stain upon the sea.

The improbable triumphed in the world with apparent injustice. Happiness had pounced on Elmsdale, had fairly kidnapped the freebooter; while him, the serious, the conscientious wooer, she flouted and scorned. Why did he fritter away his life in chase of a wildfire? Love was after all but a conceit of the brain. Ambition was more manly, pleasure more satisfying, study more profitable. He strove cynically to bind his soul with tough strands of wisdom: but Love with a cry burst the bonds and, full of the unquenchable, he soared to higher realms of contemplation, grasped Heaven, and then fell headlong with a bitter laugh at his self-deception. It were better to abjure high flights and confine himself to earth.

CHAPTER XXXIII

ENID FLIES FROM SIDNEY FOR THE SECOND TIME

ON the first of July Enid journeyed to London with her sister. Ruth had been spending a few days at Ditchley and, going to visit Enid, had been concerned at her languor and wan looks. The exhortation to return with her to town had sprung spontaneously at sight of her sister's limpness; for Ruth had some core of natural affection within a callous, prickly rind. She had spoken so strongly and authoritatively to Sidney, blaming him for keeping his wife mewed up in a retirement as remote and unwholesome as the bottom of a well, that the latter, in alarm, consented to forgo Enid's company for a fortnight. A little gaiety, Ruth anticipated, would work wonders for the invalid, who, on her side, only laughed at her elder's scolding solicitude, protesting that nothing ailed her.

Enid was glad to depart, however. It lay in her mind never to return. For a month she had sought this opportunity with a growing strength of purpose. There could be no honourable truce with Sidney since she had discovered his treason in setting a spy on her. She played with a daring project, as a cat with a mouse, doubtful all the while whether she had strength of mind sufficient for its execution, half sure that something would happen to prevent her: an uncertainty which absolved her plan from any luridness of crime and maintained it in the serenity of a day-dream.

Her farewell to Sidney at the station carried relief, the excitement of an escapade, the inevitable misgiving, near

heartache, at breaking with things known—a solution of all the partings she had ever undergone, which gave to the moment immense lustre of finality, belied, however, by dread of her own weakness, a cowardice representing the strong wall of habit, only realised as strong by those plotting to scale it. The last she saw of her husband, he stood in light clothing by a wall pied with advertisements, in pale sunlight under a stormy sky. His eyes followed the train. Just over his head a lamp showed the name of the station, which remained as part of this last glimpse of him, a label on it. Elmondham and Sidney were not to be dissociated. They were prison and gaoler, heat and fire, marsh and miasma. Together they tainted life within a certain radius, made an infected area which she could have marked off on the map. And yet he meant to be kind, he adored her; all his faults as a husband proceeded from excess of love. She steeled her heart against a traitorous softening which, if fostered, would snare her back into bondage.

Late that evening, while she was preparing for bed, Ruth came into the room.

‘Why didn’t you bring your maid, love?’ she asked, a little shocked at catching Enid in the act of combing out the thick fall of hair by which her neck and shoulders were dimmed like marble in the shower of a sunlit fountain. ‘Let me send Morley to you.’

‘Oh, no thank you.’ Enid went on preening herself with unconcern, studying her own face in the glass in a manner of abstruse contemplation. ‘You see I wanted to be quite clear of home for a fortnight—to make it a real holiday.’

On a sudden impulse of affection, Ruth stroked her sister’s hair.

‘It must be ghastly dull for you.’

‘Oh, it’s not the dullness.’

‘Then what is it?—I never saw any one look more utterly wretched than you did that day I called. There must be something?’

‘It—it’s Sidney,’ Enid blurted, turning away that her

sister might not see her crimson face—a ruse frustrated by the looking-glass.

‘What!’ Ruth vociferated. ‘I always thought you so devoted.’

Enid spoke quickly, almost to incoherence. ‘It’s my fault, I’m discontented, rebellious, fractious, wild; but it has lately got to be more than I can bear. Hermia says it’s all imagination, but I haven’t told her all . . .’

‘A lot she knows about it!’ said Ruth with scorn. ‘I think it’s quite natural. If it isn’t, then the natural woman must be a vegetable. I shan’t put up with Kenneth much longer. I’m only waiting for the right man.’

Enid, scandalised, gasped: ‘O Ruth! How *can* you?’

‘Why, isn’t it what you were just saying?’

‘No! oh no! I only meant to live apart, by myself!’

‘In hotels and boarding-houses, with a companion for propriety? Catch me!’ Ruth sneered. ‘People look just as much askance at a grass-widow in those circumstances, and you miss all the fun. . . . I’ve sometimes thought of abducting Freddy,’ she added with a laugh.

‘Freddy Land!’

‘Yes. He’s rich, you know, or will be. . . . There’s nothing to stare at, dear! You don’t know what it is to have to endure a man like Kenneth.’

‘But he’s so nice.’

‘You think so? I’m quite willing to make you a present of him. I’m sure I wish he would fall in love with some one, and leave me to my own devices. He’s always interfering. He’s ridiculously jealous of poor Freddy.’

The lightness with which Ruth aired her views, as if unconscious of their depravity, amazed Enid. The stress of her own revulsion from Sidney made her construe Ruth’s utterances literally, forgetting how Ruth had ever been inclined to daring talk as opposed to action: a bias the exact reverse of her own habit of secret thought which first transpired in deeds. It heaped on the inherent reluctance to break with old ties and associations a fear lest, in leaving

Sidney, a wrong motive should be universally imputed to her. As she lay awake, hearing a faint murmur of the town, now and then broken by the passage of a cab with clank of harness and patter of hoofs rising and dying abruptly as the vehicle entered and left the short street, the vision of Hugh Calderon made her burn from head to foot with a flush half guilty, half repudiating.

Next morning at breakfast, Ruth said: 'It's funny we should have been talking of Freddy last night'; and Enid coloured, thinking the allusion execrable before Kenneth, till her sister added: 'Uncle Steve died suddenly yesterday morning. It's in the paper.'

'Oh, I am so sorry!' said Enid. Kenneth handed her the newspaper, while Ruth went on:

'It's a stroke of luck for Freddy. He must have been worth three hundred thousand at least. I think Fred might have wired.'

The sisters spent mornings in shop-gazing, afternoons and evenings at various social functions. Enid was glad to shelve the problem of her return to Sidney, though recalled to it every morning by the letter which as sure as sunrise she found in her place at breakfast. Twice in the fortnight she wrote to him, two short letters in return for a dozen long ones, in which she strove to seem agreeable, yet not so much so as to set him flying to town on a hysterical gust of tenderness. After all, she supposed, she must go back to him; she could hardly do otherwise, having written affectionately.

One afternoon, when waiting in the dining-room for Ruth, who had ordered a carriage in which they were to pay a round of calls, the latter burst in with an excited face.

'I can't go after all, dear: you wouldn't care to go alone, would you? I've just had the oddest note from Freddy. He says he's in a terrible state, and must see me this afternoon; so I shall stop in. Do you know, I'm afraid he's going to be silly! He has talked nonsense before . . . Well, I shall have to have it out with him. Of course I

don't listen. I like him very much, and he's useful in many ways: he's a boy one can order about, and you know one wants some one like that. And he's rich, which is another advantage . . . There's the carriage! You wouldn't like to go alone, would you?'

'What's that, my dear?' said Kenneth, entering in frock-coat and light waistcoat, carrying his top-hat and gloves.

Ruth fronted him with heightened colour, saying with a shade of defiance: 'I suppose you're off to the club?—Well, I was just telling Enid that I can't go with her, and the carriage has just come. Freddy's coming to see me, and you know I must be nice to him now he's in such trouble about his father's death. . . . There's the coachman ringing like a cabman!'—Indignation froze her. 'That comes of hiring! They're always impatient, and they always manage to do something to let people know it's only a hired turn-out. In future I *will* have two men on the box, Kenneth, whatever you say! Come and look for yourself.' She stood in the bow-window. 'I declare if there isn't an errand-boy holding the horse! Now he's climbing back. He has given the boy a penny! And—oh!'—she clenched her small hands—'the boy has spat on it! All the street must be laughing! Never go to those stables again, Kenneth. . . . It all comes of your stinginess in not letting me have a carriage of my own. I don't know why I give in to you for it'd come out of my money.'

'The carriage is here, ma'am.'

'Tell him to go away again. I'm obliged to stop in—unless you'd like a drive alone, Enid?'

'Would you object to my accompanying you, Enid?' said Kenneth, with a little bow. 'I have nothing to do this afternoon.'

'Oh, thank you so much! May we go in the park? I want to see the dresses, and you can name the people to me.'

He was at her disposal, to go where she chose. In the

couple of hours they spent together, he confided to her his disgust of the frequency of Freddy Land in his house, and dread lest Ruth should somehow compromise herself. Since childhood he had never bared his heart to a woman. He had never opened it fully to his wife. The solace was immense. In Enid there was nothing that jarred. As she lolled beside him, swaying a little to the rhythm of the carriage, he considered Boyne an uncommonly lucky man.

She was very sympathetic, instructing him like a mother as they drove along; now and then interrupting herself to inquire the use of some building or admire a passing equipage. Then, with a swift turn to humour, she told how Freddy had dared to propose to her at Ditchley, and with what scorn she had declined. The reminiscence set them both laughing. It was the first time young Land had been presented to Kenneth in a purely ridiculous light. The revelation did him good. Drawing near home, he realised that the outing proposed in torment had evolved the happiest two hours he had spent since his marriage.

‘I wonder if my aversion’s still here?’ he said, as he followed Enid upstairs.

‘I shouldn’t be surprised.’

‘No more should I!’ They glanced at each other and smiled.

‘Let Ruth know you think it a joke, and she’s cured!’ breathed Enid, as they gained the landing.

Ruth sat alone in the drawing-room, on a sofa. At their entry she sprang up, tragically erect.

‘Has the bird flown?’ said Kenneth, looking round, and stifling a laugh with difficulty, they had made so sure of finding Freddy.

‘Oh yes; hours ago! He was rude, Kenneth! He insulted me! I hope you’ll forbid him the house!’

‘I’m not going to interfere in lovers’ quarrels,’ said Kenneth; and Enid shot approval out of the corners of her eyes. ‘The house is your own in so far as receiving people goes. If you forbid him, he’ll hardly need my veto.’

He went to the window. 'It's a lovely day and we've had a delightful drive—I can speak for myself at least. . . . What was the quarrel about?'

'Don't be so vulgar, Kenneth: I'm surprised at you! As if I should stoop to quarrel with any fellow. He insulted me, I tell you, grossly!'

'Well, I should quarrel with any "fellow" who insulted me,' said Kenneth quietly. 'What did you do then? What did he do? We're all in the dark.'

Taking example from Enid, he sat down and looked expectant.

'Oh, don't gape at me like a pair of idiots! I can't tell you in cold blood.'

Ruth sank back on the sofa, raising hands to her hair, which was in perfect order. After patting it, stroking it, and feeling for errant wisps not in existence, she exclaimed pettishly:

'Well, if you want to know, his father has left him without a penny.'

Kenneth showed genuine concern. 'You don't say so!'

'Well, when I say "without a penny," I mean he has very little. The old man—you know what a tyrant he always was, Enid!—has left it in his will that Fred shall only inherit his fortune after he has been ten years an underling in some shop or other, and has borne a good character all the while. Otherwise it's to go to charities, and Freddy will have only two hundred a year for life. It really is hard on him, after the way he's been swaggering about, and I can understand his being cut up; but that doesn't justify him in speaking to me as he did this afternoon.'

'What was it? Did he ask for his presents back?' asked Kenneth innocently.

Ruth stamped her foot. 'No, he did not!' she screamed. 'He isn't quite such a cad as that! . . . If you must know, he had the cheek to ask me to run away with him—to a—to a cottage somewhere! He seemed to have mistaken all

my kindness for encouragement, said that he'd only been waiting for his father's death to enable him to do the thing handsomely. And now that he's disinherited he was in despair, but expected me to bolt with him just the same. I told him to go and work, as his father wished. And then he dared to talk as if there'd been something between us—was most insulting: actually caught hold of me! If you call yourself a man, you won't let the matter pass, Kenneth!'

'Oh, I'll give it him—when next I see him!' said Captain Stoke with enthusiasm.

It was the first time in his life that he had deliberately played comedy. The plaudits in Enid's eyes, joined to those of his own heart, flattered him exceedingly. Add the relief of final riddance of a bugbear, and you have a state of childish rapture. He presented a new and shining side of his personality to Ruth, somewhat dazzling her. Enid rejoiced in their improved relations.

But soon the time came for her to go home, and she was very loth. She abhorred the necessity of return to a bondage which, if not in itself degrading, degraded her; and so was doubly aggravating inasmuch as to other people revolt seemed preposterous. However, she had written to Sidney, fixing a train; and that pledged her.

It was a burning day, and her compartment filled with people hieing to the east-coast for air. A baby in the arms of its nurse enlivened the journey with periodical wailings expressive of every one's sentiments in the stuffy carriage. Enid, trying to deaden thought with reading, was constantly recalled to a painful consciousness by the infant's scream.

After Ipswich the train stopped everywhere, and Enid counted the stations dolorously, like a child going to school.

A well-known tuft of trees warned of Elmondham, and her heart set up a violent beating while her brain grew spasmodical in its function, with bursts of frantic thought and lulls of inanity. Sidney would be there to meet her. She must go on, do something irrevocable. Only her irresolution, her cowardice was dragging her back to him!

Thought of the old Anthonies in their cottage by the sea flashed on her. Martha's lodgings. She would go to her—for a day or two.

Appeared the grey church tower, the red roofs of the town peeping amid solemn trees. They glided relentlessly towards her.

A lady rose and took her parcel from the rack. 'Won't you take my place?' said Enid glibly; and the lady thanked her, the movement clearing her way to the door.

She saw a confusion of sheds, of people standing expectant; and then the train came to a stand. Her only hope was that Sidney had not descried her. Another lady rising from the far corner, Enid made haste to slip into the place thus vacated, thereby offending a neighbour who had meant to appropriate that particular seat.

Then it came upon her as an ague that she was severing herself from Hugh also, that she might never see him again. But, 'that makes it right; that justifies me!' came the triumphant plea. The incident of self-mortification shed a heavenly ray on lawlessness. Women had run away from their husbands to enter nunneries, and become blessed saints. Could she be dubbed sinner, if, in leaving Sidney, she at the same time renounced the world? The sophistry flashed through her brain while her body was all a-tremble with apprehensions of surprise by Sidney.

Sitting close in her corner where there was least danger of detection, her eyes were drawn irresistibly to the open door framing a space of sunlit wall, across which men and women moved darkly. She thought she saw Sidney peering eagerly, but could not be sure it was he, her eyes were so dim. Presently the door was slammed by a porter and the train moved on.

The next stop was at Stenham Market, where again she dared not show her face. It was the station nearest to Ditchley, and some one who knew her might be on the platform. That past, she strove to reason herself out of the silly trepidation into which her own temerity had

plunged her. It was strange if a woman could not diverge by a foot from the beaten track without losing her senses and feeling like a hunted thief. Action and reaction had been wellnigh simultaneous in her case, and the strain had produced a moment's delirium: there, she thought, was the explanation.

Not until alighting at a station whence a light railway ran to Easterwick and Blythmouth did she remember that her luggage had been labelled "Elmondham," and consequently thrown out there. She carried nothing but her dressing-case and a sheaf of illustrated papers, as had been her case when eloping with Sidney. The circumstance seeming to balance, to round off a story, oddly enough restored her tranquillity. She went to the booking-office and bought a third-class ticket for Easterwick.

The little train was on the point of starting. Seats ran lengthways as in tramcars, leaving a clear passage down the middle. The doors at either end standing open, by leaning a little forward she could see through all the coaches from tender to guard's van. It wound away through wide pastures, richly green, dotted with cattle. Feathery marsh-trees—willows and poplars—had a slender feminine grace compared with the sturdy elms and oaks which plumed the rising ground. The sun shone through the twinkling leaves and turned them golden. Farms nestling on the slope made each a complete picture with its stack-yard and warden trees, mellowed by the saffron dust of sunset. On the other side, smoke from the engine cast on the meadows a floating shadow that seemed alive in its writhings and fluctuations. Enid saw church towers, a windmill. At one point the low sun made a dazzle, as of seething gold, which the eye avoided. Its rays shot through the train, lighting faces.

A lad at Easterwick station, a mere hut beside the line, gladly undertook to be her guide to the village, which lay at some distance seaward across a stretch of heath. The little waves of the land were dark with furze, which caught

a gloss of velvet from the sun's last rays. The ruined church rose before her, with a long train of cottages straggling from it down past the windmill to congregate on the low green by the shore. Windmill, church and cottages stood up grey against the lighted sky.

In reply to a question of her guide, she said : ' I'm going to Mrs. Anthony's, if she can take me in.'

' Oh, ah! . . . They ain't let—not that I ha' heerd on. Rum old dears, they be! Gen'l'm'n Ant'ny—that's how we calls him—he be unaccountable fond o' the sea; but bless ye, Miss, a don't know a sprat from a herrin'. He ha' got a telescoat, and runned up a flagstaff agen his house . . . That and diggin', that's his handwritin'. They dew say as all what he plant to-day he dig up to-morrer, just to see if that's a-dewin'. . . . They fare crewel hard on us boys, he and his missus dew, and that's a fact, Miss.'

Emerging by a lane on to the green, they came in close sight of the cottage, which a new white flagstaff made conspicuous, and Enid dismissed her satellite, who betrayed no wish to go further. With a grin and 'Thank ye, Miss,' he scampered to join others of his kind at play on the sward.

She pushed open the gate of the little garden, and as she did so, the cottage door opened revealing Martha in the cavity.

' Miss Enid! I saw ye comin' but couldn't trust my eyes. Come in, my dear! Is anything the matter?'

' I've come to lodge with you for a few days, if you can take me—till I can make arrangements.'

Her way of speaking the last words caused Martha to stare as if she saw a ghost.

' Well, come in, Miss; do now!'

' I have left my husband; I think, for good,' said Enid in the sitting-room, with the phantom of a smile. She sank down wearily on a chair.

Martha's mouth fell open, and her eyes grew vacant, void of understanding. She glared out of the little window

at the cottages across the green, bathed in the last rosy glow, with peeps of a lilac sea between them.

‘Well, Miss, you’ll be wantin’ your supper. I’ll get yer somethin’ as quick as can be. ’Ow’s yer luggage a-comin’.’

‘It was put out at Elmondham. I’ve come from London to-day; I’ve been staying with Ruth.’

A host of questions troubled Martha’s face, but were checked by a resolute snap of the lips. A rigid formalist, like so many of her class, Martha had as it were a special office for every event and vicissitude of life. The service was short or long, gabbled perfunctorily or slowly and feelingly intoned, according to the magnitude and degree of solemnity of the occasion. Here she smelt a mystery high and profound, of consequence beyond dreaming; and it would have been wellnigh sacrilegious for her to approach it lightly, on terms of casual discussion, without due reflection and preparation of the proper face, the fitting frame of mind. She even prevented old Tom from trotting in to welcome Enid from a dread of his constitutional levity, unseemly and distracting as a bird in church.

Enid would fain have got the explanation over; but she had experience of Martha, and knew it best to await her good time.

CHAPTER XXXIV

ENID BOYNE DENIES HER MASTER

FROM the sitting-room window Enid could see some ten old cottages, each individualised by some feature, grouped round the green like gaffers round a table. Some clothes-posts were included in the outlook. The background was sea, discerned as a bank above the swampy coast, ever changing hue from grey to green, from sand-colour to amber, from purple to pale blue; at one time hardly distinct from the sky, anon opaque as the land. Behind Martha's cottage was another strip of garden whence the church tower and the windmill could be seen, and a glimpse of the tidal river caught through a clump of storm-beaten trees.

Martha, in her leisure moments, came and sat with her at the window which the old woman used to pass time as others pick up a book. They spoke little, but Martha often shook her head and sighed, that being her way of expressing disapproval consistently with devotion and respect.

Old Thomas, for his part, lost sight of the poignancy of the situation in delight at having his idol in the house. With pride he showed his garden, his new white flagstaff, and an old railway-carriage he had procured for a summer-house. Martha reprehended his glee as analogous to jiggling in a house of woe.

On the morrow of her arrival at Easterwick, Enid had written to Sidney stating her retreat, and adding that she wished to remain there undisturbed—'at any rate for a time.' That 'at any rate' was the nearest she dared venture to an ultimatum, her mind being even now far from made

up. Martha's opposition, founded as it was on sheer common sense and the hard facts of life, somewhat shook her faith in her own infallibility.

For two days she heard nothing. On the third night she was too perturbed to sleep, but rose in the dawning and walked at sunrise by the river-bank.

The tide was running out. The current rippled dove-grey, save where the rising sun stirred languid pink snakes upon the surface. Weeds of the under-bank, which the flood tide covered, wore rusty hues of green things nipped and thwarted. Above waved flaxen grasses, long and hairy. A strip of mud between sedge and water was grey like the stream, and opalescent to the rosy beams shooting from the east like the spokes of a fiery wheel. It was slimed with dead green seaweed, with here and there a patch of more livid, poisonous green. Great stakes stood rotting in the shallows, with remains of cross-beams, once a landing-stage. A boat, keel upwards, lay amid the grass at the brink. Sea-birds circled shrieking. The ebb kept sucking at the shores.

Turning, the sun was in her eyes. The black, red-tiled huts on Easterwick quay blotted a radiance. Afar, between mouldering piers, she had a narrow view of waves breaking on the bar in amber surf.

The air was deliciously pure and refreshing. It so nerved her that she could look forward without flinching. She was vividly reminded of that voyage from Ostend when she stood on the deck of the packet, while the sun rose on the Thames and sails flitted seaward like shadows. She thought of Hugh and Sidney, and deemed herself valiant enough to cope with her love for the one, her aversion to the other.

Once more she was protagonist in her mind's drama, the central figure on which the light played, a prominence she had lost during the suspense of the last two days. Hugh Calderon had held the stage while Sidney, her father, Hermia, and Miles the spy entered, mouthed and made their exits, she watching paralysed from the wings. Once more

she became for herself the most important person living—a sign of health restored, of nerves re-braced.

It was good to be near the sea, good to dwell on a sea-girt isle where the breezes sing of freedom.

Hugh Calderon and Sidney became alike satellites. She felt strong enough to hold her course inexorably alone, keeping each revolving round her in a relentless orbit.

‘Well, I never!’ said Martha, whom she found cleaning the doorstep. ‘I never dreamt but you were a-bed, Miss. I was just this minute thinkin’ to call you. You’re lookin’ yourself again. There’s the pride o’ the mornin’ in your face. The air smell that sweet betimes of a mornin’.’ She desisted from her scrubbing for a moment to draw a deep breath. ‘I’ll make haste and get yer breakfast. You’re famished, stands to reason.’

Enid sat at the window after breakfast, enjoying her own equanimity, when a gentleman issued from the mouth of the lane which led across the heath from the railway-station, and stepped on to the green, looking inquisitively round upon the cottages. Seeing him make selection, she promptly ducked her head behind the window-sill petunias. It was Hugh, and he was after her; he could have no other errand in that sequestered place. Why did he come, and not Sidney? Had anything happened to Sidney? How had he discovered her retreat? It was wicked, cruel, tactless of him to hunt her out. If it became known people would draw their own conclusions to her detriment.

She saw him eye the cottage attentively as if it had been some rarity. He approached the gate, when she fled hot-cheeked to her bedroom, determined to deny him audience. Martha had just begun to tidy the chamber. A broom and a dustpan leaned just within the door; while the old woman pounded the bedding with her fists.

‘What is it, Miss Enid dear?’

‘Oh, nothing. I’ve only come for my hat; it’s such a lovely morning.’

Pinning on her hat before the looking-glass she saw that

Hugh had walked on, probably thinking it too early to wait on her. Her heart sank unreasonably. He would call by and by, when there would be more people abroad, and any one might see him. Perhaps Sidney might come in the course of the morning, and Heaven knew what he would say or do on encountering his rival. She must preclude such a catastrophe at any cost.

She was in the mood called heroic, when it is fierce joy to strangle the heart's yearnings. This mood impelled her to follow and despatch him once for all.

'I shan't be gone long,' she said to Martha as she went downstairs.

Ascending the village street, past the white windmill, past the ruined church, she kept him in sight. In places the road was sandy, retarding his steps, and she held the same pace, quickening and slowing when he did, undesirous of overtaking him where they could be seen from cottage windows. Once he turned and looked back in an absent way; but he went on again directly, and she did not think he saw her.

A little beyond the church the hedges fell away suddenly, and a long stretch of heath rolled out between fir woods wide apart. The tawny road, visible for a mile or more, was deserted. In face of that solitude, she thought it safe to overtake him. At her approach he turned and met her, face to face. His surprise was less than she had expected. His mien was deprecating, yet a trifle dogged, at once a prayer and a warning. The look melted the soul of her resolve almost to vanishing point: but she still clung to the form of it as a Papist tells beads in temptation. The struggle furnished her with a mask of coldness.

She looked for him to speak, and his continued silence gave to her opening words the impatient ring required of duty. She was heart-rent by her own utterance.

'I saw you pass my lodgings just now and think twice about calling; and I followed you, thinking there might be some message—from my husband.'

In a preoccupation, as one bursting with a single subject treats questions irrelevant thereto, he replied :

‘No ; I’ve got no message.’

Her look said plainly enough, ‘Then why come here ? why follow me ?’ but he chose not to answer it.

‘Has your coming here to do with me ?’ Proceeding, she gathered vehemence in her part as a falling stone gains impetus from its own movement.

‘Yes.’

‘Then please go away at once !’ Her haughtiness was extreme, outrageous ; exceeding the intention, as she realised with a pang ; but the scene was getting out of her control.

Again he made no rejoinder. She moved on, and he moved beside her ; she watching the play of her own feet, he looking in front of him and furtively, from time to time, at her. The pale road ran before them, parting the swart heath. The fir-trees, shuddering to the wind, trenched in silhouette upon a white sky pooled with blue.

At length she looked up, and some of the wrath was gone from her voice as she asked : ‘What made you come ?’

‘I don’t quite know. Something stronger than myself. A possession, a spell, if you like ! I came because I couldn’t help coming. I am beginning to learn that I’m weak.’

‘It is wrong—unkind to me !’ she murmured, with a strain at indignation.

Very earnest all at once, he exclaimed : ‘Do you mean that ?’

She made no reply, following the precedent he had set of silence where the truth would compromise.

The murmur of the fir woods came distinct to her ears with faint sighing of the sea. A lark soared up from a patch of furze carolling as if its heart would break. Enid’s eyes, glad of harmless employment, followed its quivering ascent until the singer was lost to sight and but the song remained.

Then, with transparent effort, Hugh said : ‘I may as well out with it :—I came because I love you. It sounds

hackneyed, but there's no other word. If I knew one stronger I'd use it.'

She stood still, a-quake from head to foot, and waited with scared eyes and tightened lips; aching, he supposed, to slap his face.

'You haunt me,' he went on with a quiet, sad insistence, more impressive than ardour, to which she could not take exception. 'I heard from that man of yours—Miles, isn't his name?—that you were here; and the rest was blind instinct.'

Her eyes flashed for a second. 'I suppose you gave Miles something for his information. Perhaps he is in the habit of telling you. . . . He is the kind of man. . . .'

'I assure you, no. I saw the man in Elmondham yesterday, and happened to ask if you were back, when he pulled a long face and told me the story—in confidence of course, as to a friend of the family. I don't think Mr. Boyne wise to make a friend of that man.'

Furious at the ill-success of her blind hit at him, which had only given him a standpoint, she said gallingly:

'To the point, if you please! . . . Knowing that I am married, calling yourself a friend of my husband, it is wicked—dastardly—currish of you to follow me like this! You think because—because I have broken part of my marriage vow, I would go any length. How dare you? . . . You can't have an atom of respect for me. What creature do you think me? I despise and loathe a man who can act like that. Not for all the world would I live with you!'

'I never dreamt of asking it; I had no wish to insult you, believe me,' Hugh muttered very sadly. 'I only thought I should like to tell you, that it would make things somewhat more bearable if you knew.'

She hung abashed, smarting with his disclaimer which rebuked her stingingly. In excitement she had overshot the mark, had imputed to him her own secret thought, had believed it spoken by him. If he had guessed!

'Well, I suppose I had better be going,' he remarked in a toneless voice.

'You had better be going,' came the relentless echo.

'Since I am not wanted!'

Not wanted. . . . Great God! . . . With her brain a-throb and her whole body tingling from his mere proximity. But with the woman's ardour in self-sacrifice, she repeated inexorably:

'Since you are certainly not wanted!'

'And may I never speak to you again?' he broke out bitterly.

It was a true cry, though whispered. For Enid it resounded from east to west, over land and sea, crashing in her ears like thunder.

'Never again.'

'You can't mean that!—Whatever happens?'

'At any rate, not as things stand. Common-sense, if you have any, will inform you that under altered circumstances I could have no grave objection to meeting you as an acquaintance—like any other chance acquaintance. I could not refuse you that.' Her tone implied the will to refuse him everything.

'Well, good-bye.'

'Good-bye,' she murmured distantly.

He lingered a moment as though in hope she might relent, then strode back towards the village. She stood a while, looking after him with a gaze that saw nothing on earth besides. Thought of the life-wound she had dealt him maddened her; hot tears sprang in her eyes, uncontrollable as the spurt of blood from a gash. Yet his pain had been her pleasure while they wrestled face to face.

She was proud to see him walk erect, bearing up manfully under a blow the force of which she could measure by her own anguish.

Then she herself set off walking, wellnigh running, in the other direction, with hands clenched and lips compressed, her eyes great with the effort to restrain the tears which promised to shake her whole frame did she relax for a second. Branching from the road, she followed a lane of

smooth turf that ran through a high growth of whin and bracken, till she could endure no longer but, plunging into the fern, drooped suddenly and flung herself down in a little dell of soft grass and moss, like a nest in the midst of the brake. There she lay moaning, sobbing, plucking at the long grass like a dying thing.

She felt mutilated, self-maimed, but half a woman. Overhead the high mist, which had lain as a thin white veil upon the sky, tore and dispersed ; the sun gathered strength with every minute ; the skylarks sang deliriously.

And all the while she was conscious of a meed of spiritual grace derived from her victory, the guerdon for which she had been frantically struggling, and to which she was now as indifferent as a mourner to the scent of flowers upon the dead. A wind-flower for Adonis, a shower of cold white bloom in place of fruit, moonlight for warmth upon a winter's night. . . . Ah, ah ! The poor exchange !

She was self-frustrated, a thing to toss, and moan, and yearn eternally. For her there could be no fruition, only famine and regret beneath the flouting, triumphant banner of conscience. She hated conscience as men loathe a bloodless tyrant.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE FIGHT FOR AIR

ENID hurried back through the village with no thought but to regain her own bedroom and bathe her eyes. But as she passed the gate Martha appeared at the cottage door with finger to lip. At the same time she became aware of a murmur of voices within, and of her father exclaiming 'Here she comes!' whereupon there was silence.

'He's 'ere,' whispered Martha, 'and the master too, and that there Mrs. Garland that was, which means no good to any. They come off the noonday train.'

'I must go to my room, first!' said Enid, pushing by her with averted face. But just then the door of the sitting-room opened and her father came out and caught her arm.

'Come to your husband.'

He forced her into the room, shut the door again behind him, and stood guard over it.

Sidney stepped forward with an appeal to her, but was struck limp by her glance of withering scorn from under half-drooped eyelids. Hermia, seated near the window, with back to the light, smiled wanly. In the concentration of her mental powers on the other two, Enid scarce discerned her, aware intuitively that she was a non-combatant.

Sidney, with his bleat of the injured innocent was loathsome. For him, it seemed, she had immolated herself and Hugh. He stood just then for loveless marriage, a hideous idol, blind amid the reek of human sacrifices. Apart from the figurative, he was a coward and a tell-tale, or he would have come alone, without appeal to the authorities, without

this *posse comitatus* to overawe her. Then he might have found her tractable, she thought, partly to vindicate her present obduracy.

‘Go and kiss him!’ said old Simon gruffly, giving her at the same time a slight push. ‘Let’s have no more sulking. Come on, Sidney! Don’t stand there blinking like an idiot.’ The embarrassment of the pair irritated him.

Hermia rose significantly and, as if at a given signal, Mr. Glover took his hat and stick off the table, saying:

‘We’ll leave you for half an hour—time to kiss and make friends. . . . Mind, Enid: no more nonsense! Show a little sense; we’ve had enough of whimsies.’

The window was open at the bottom, and Enid heard the click and slam of the gate, the noise of receding footsteps on the road, through the throbbing silence in which she stood with Sidney. To break that silence, growing irksome, she at length said: ‘Pray sit down,’ herself setting the example. Sidney gave a bitter laugh at the bathos of the invitation so simply uttered. As if it mattered whether he stood or sat! Blind through strong emotion to all save her cruel face, he could not have described the room, had not even noticed that a chair stood near. The erect position giving some show of advantage, he retained it, saying with a sting of anger:

‘Well, you’re doing your best to kill me and to break your father’s heart. I hope you’re proud!’

‘Of course it’s all my fault?’ she rejoined icily.

‘All yours, and that hound Calderon’s. I see it all, though you think to blind me. I suppose he’s not far off?’

Enid rose up suddenly before him. He could read her face but dimly for the brightness of the window. Her hair, touched in its contours by the sunlight, burned like a nimbus. He turned stupid as at a divine apparition of wrath.

‘How dare you!’ she said in a choking voice. ‘Leave the house this instant!’

At that he fell on his knees, clutching her dress, her hand, and whining and mumbling. She beheld him grovel with a

sovereign contempt which would have bred tolerance had it touched him only. But it lashed her also. Rage leapt from the reflection that she had given herself to this poor, mean creature, was bound to him by indissoluble ties of intimacy and could never, as long as she lived, be purged of the taint of him. Had he proved a slaving idiot she could not more deeply have abhorred their wedlock. Still, it was pitiful to see him thus.

‘Get up, Sidney, and play the man!’ she said more indulgently. ‘You have my answer. I can never be happy with you, nor you with me, if you will only see it. You know how miserable I’ve made you.’

‘O Enid!—pet!—I’ll do anything! I’ll try and improve! I know I’m a jealous brute; but then I can’t help it: you’re everything to me; there’ll be nothing left to live for. I’ll try hard to improve!’

‘I’ve heard you say all that some hundreds of times before,’ she observed cuttingly. ‘It has lost all weight. Kindly remember that Mr. Calderon has nothing whatever to do with me, and do not in future associate his name with mine. You insult me by supposing that, in this separation, I have any other object than to regain my personal freedom. I never loved you . . .’

He gave a cry and clutched at her again, recalling the thousand times when, for the sake of peace, she had said she loved him. She paid then the full price of her duplicity in the past. Pet names by which he had called her were cast up like playthings from a ship engulfed, pathetic in fragile homeliness amid the drift of wreckage.

‘I never loved you,’ Enid persisted, though her eyes were dim and her ears deafened by the conflict of pride with pity raging within her. The whole pathos of his position flashing on her, her compassion was unbearable anguish. In deadly fear lest some word should press the spring of tears and she should yield.

‘Now go!’ she said resolutely. ‘You may come and see me sometimes, as a friend; but not just yet. You must give

me time.' Her lips smiled—'Perhaps—who knows?—I may come to another mind if you give me time. Now do me a kindness:—Go and meet papa; tell him it's no use pestering me, and ask Hermia to come here for a few minutes.'

The kindness of her tone imposed on Sidney, who was in that partly conscious state, like drunkenness, when men are compliant to the tone of a voice, to the touch of a hand, the slaves of suggestion. With a dazed look he rose and went out as she had bidden him, fumbling a while with the door-handle ere he could turn it.

She dropped into an easy-chair and waited, eyes fixed on the wall which had a blue paper spattered with large clusters of brick-red flowers. Each of these seemed to come forward as she looked at it. Shouts of the village children wending to afternoon school reached her as from a great distance.

Presently she heard the gate creak, but did not turn her head. It was not worth while, for nothing could interest her now.

A tap at the door, and her father reappeared with Hermia. She could hear some one pacing the road outside, now and then striking the garden pales with a stick, and knew without looking that it was Sidney.

'Now what is all this, my dear child?' began old Simon gravely. His son-in-law's disjointed narrative, still more his deathly face, had at last convinced him that the estrangement was serious and not a mere pet as he had persisted in deeming it. Having to judge between the duty towards his daughter and that he owed to society at large, he bore on his brow a weight of parental anxiety. 'Is it true that you have refused to go back with Sidney?'

'I would sooner die than go back with him.' Enid lifted her head wearily, and met her father's eyes without flinching as without defiance.

'Dear me! dear me!' In total dismay the old gentleman took refuge in rubbing his hands, a trick of which Hermia had believed him cured.

‘You are selfish,’ said Hermia for Enid’s ear alone. ‘You only consider yourself. You don’t think at all of your husband’s distress. That man worships you; you will wreck his life.’

It was the orthodox voice of conscience.

‘I can’t go back. I cannot bear him. I hate the life! You don’t know what it was. He set spies on me—suspected me of crime.’

‘What’s that?’ said her father, suddenly alert.

‘Oh, never mind! That’s only a detail. The real trouble is in myself. In justice to him, I can’t; how can I make him happy if I dislike him? Already he had made himself ill with jealousy for which he had no ground. Just because I was cold to him, he thought I must be disgracing myself with some one else.’

After a pause for recuperation,

‘But have you counted the cost?’ her father said gently. ‘There’ll be a fearful scandal, and you’re a handsome girl—woman, I suppose I must say. Living separate from your husband, you will be looked on as fair game by the men. You will suffer persecutions, temptations too . . .’

She interrupted: ‘I think you might trust me, papa!’

‘Yes, perhaps’—Hermia took up the burden of admonition. ‘But lead as retired, as irreproachable a life as you will, respectable women will still hold aloof from you and keep a sharp eye on their husbands, sons, and brothers.’

‘Yes; and men’ll try for you,’ added Simon earnestly. ‘It’s a perilous way of life for a young woman. . . . Why not come home to us?’ (‘Ah, do!’ pleaded Hermia.) ‘Perhaps you may change your mind one day, and there’d be Sidney close at hand. You’d only have to whistle and he’d come flying!’

‘Please don’t talk like that!’ exclaimed Enid, with such plain disgust that her father subjoined: ‘Well, he shall keep away then. I’ll give him the tip. You shall have your own rooms and do just what you like.’

‘I had rather stay here—at all events for some time to

come. You can fancy the storm of gossip there'll be in Elmondham, just at first. Surely you can trust Martha to look after me? Am I so very giddy?'

She smiled, and her father was as profoundly touched as if she had wept. That piteous pretence at a smile confirmed him in his new resolve to support and protect her, lawfully or unlawfully, from any one she disliked whether in or out of reason. He remembered too how he, in the first place, had constrained her to marry Sidney. Her reluctance of those days substantiated her present attitude and sanctioned it in some degree.

'Well, dear, I'll talk to Sidney. You may trust me to do what I can to smooth matters and prevent too loud a scandal. There'll be some bother about money-matters, it's inevitable, but I dare say we can come to some arrangement. Now, before going, I should like a word with Martha. Come with me, Hermia.'

Enid knew that he was going privately to instruct Martha to keep a sharp look-out after any men under fifty who might seem attracted; and at any other time would have laughed to think of his using such a precaution for her, the least susceptible of women, in a place like Easterwick.

From the window, watching the departure of her relatives, she saw that Sidney was refractory at setting out, but her father held him fast by the arm, and Hermia, walking on his other side, seemed gently to remonstrate. In that grouping they disappeared in the lane's mouth.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE TERM OF SIDNEY BOYNE'S MALADY

BANISHED by Enid, Hugh Calderon strode through the village wrapped in misery as in a lashing, blinding hailstorm.

Careless of direction, he presently found himself on the sea-beach, trampling shingle whereon little waves fell with a hoarse murmur. To recruit, and give his thoughts time for composure, he flung himself down on the pebbles.

Huge clouds, soft and white and lazy, made a dazzle on the smooth sea, their reflection striping its silky undulations vertically. Two far-off sailing-boats seemed motionless notwithstanding that a fair breeze blew. The whole sweep of the bay, from the fishing-town of Blythmouth on its headland to a remoter southern ness of sandy cliffs was visible from where he sat. Behind him the roofs of the village, of every hue from pimpernel to wall-flower, peeped over the high, grey beach with its mane of bluish bents; the white sails of the mill turned slowly on a clear blue sky, and the tops of a few sunlit stacks wore the colour of honey.

The air was strong and renovating. When he rose it was to seek an inn, for he hungered; the smart of his sentence had produced the bracing effect of a sound thrashing on a healthy youngster.

While partaking of bread and cheese and beer in a parlour where the light filtered through a hedge of flowers upon the window-ledge, he pondered Enid's behaviour, and acknowledged that it could not have been otherwise without damage to his idea of her. Having finished his meal he studied the time-table and, seeing there was a train in less

than one hour's time, set out to stroll leisurely towards the station, which was situated on the heath nearly a mile from the village.

The way, the merest cart-track, was sandy in places, in others grassy, the ruts seldom less than ankle-deep. Song of larks innumerable suffused and permeated the brisk air. Topping a whin-clad rise, he came sooner than he had expected upon the little hut that served for booking-office and waiting-room, set on the edge of rank marshes which the line skirted.

Three figures pacing the platform in conclave were recognisable as Mr. and Mrs. Glover and Sidney Boyne, the last people he wished to encounter. But it was then too late to turn back without noising his purpose to avoid them.

'Mr. Calderon! How d'ye do?' said old Simon, giving his hand a grip, made fierce by the emotion to which he was manifestly a prey. Notwithstanding this delusive heartiness, Hugh could perceive that he was unwelcome. Mrs. Glover gave her hand limply, without a glance; he thought she divined his errand there. Turning to shake hands with Boyne he was appalled to receive a glance of mad enmity. Sidney clasped his hands behind him.

'How dare you face me, you sneaking, underhand scoundrel! You've seen my wife; that's why you're here! My God, for a horsewhip!'

'Sidney—Sidney! For shame, my boy! Are you mad?' Old Glover caught his son-in-law's arm and dragged him back. 'He's beside himself, Mr. Calderon; you must forget this! We're all in great trouble. His wife, my daughter Enid——'

'Shooting's too good for the cur!' shouted Sidney, struggling in the clutch of his father-in-law.

'I think perhaps you had better leave us,' said Hermia to Hugh very coldly. 'The train will not be here for half an hour.'

He chose to ignore the suggestion; saying, with a cool look at Boyne, 'You are under some misapprehension. If

you will walk apart with me a minute, I think I can clear your mind.' Sidney's hysteric rage fell under the calm control of his rival's gaze. 'Will you favour me with a minute's private conversation?'

Sidney came forward unsteadily. Hermia and her husband watched the twain walk off on the heath in a state composite of amazement, of relief that the storm had blown off for the moment, of fear lest it should gather afresh.

'You know of my devotion to your wife, I fancy?' said Hugh when they were beyond hearing of the others. Sidney assented in a bewildered way. 'But you draw unwarrantable—totally wrong conclusions. I have seen Mrs. Boyne this morning, it must have been before you arrived; you can think what you like of my motives. She let me know she disliked me, forbade me ever to go near her.'

'Is this true?' cried Sidney, with a sudden brightening it was painful to see, for the facility and inconsequence of the turn suggested insanity even more strongly than had his previous fury. 'Then you're like me! We're in the same boat!'

'You mustn't fall foul of me for thinking of her; that I can't help. You, the lucky man, should pity us outcasts, not seek to slay us.'

'But I'm not lucky! I—I'm in hell, I tell you! She has refused me too—her husband! O Calderon, you don't know what she is to me! She told me she never loved me. After all this time we've lived together so—so happily.' Sidney fairly blubbered. The evidence of tears finally convinced Hugh that the man was out of his mind, and caused him to register a mental vow to remain with him till he recovered balance. At present Boyne was quite unfit to be left alone.

'Well, now that I've explained matters, suppose we rejoin the others,' said Hugh, to stem a flow of confidence relative to his passion for Enid, which Sidney in his maudlin state began to slobber forth, and which, as addressed to himself, Hugh found indecent. A minute later, to dispel the

anxiety legible on Mr. Glover's face, he declared : 'It was all a mistake.'

Hermia standing aloof, he went up to her, observing under his breath : 'He's not fit to be left alone. I propose to travel home with him and spend the night, if necessary, at the White House.' She replied icily : 'It's very good of you' ; and he turned away, biting his lip.

Sidney clutched at the proposal, and Simon Glover heartily approved it. The old gentleman had been severely shaken by the poet's unlooked-for pugnacity, following close upon much wild and irrational talk. He rejoiced to be relieved of so turbulent a charge.

Sidney, for his part, clung to his comrade in disfavour as a child to the fount of sympathy. In his mania for expansion, next to having Enid herself, it was good to be with one to whom he could talk of her freely, one who, loving her even as he did, would not tire of listening or rebuke his extravagance. When the little train came running like a child's toy across the marshes from Blythmouth, and they had taken seat with the smokers, he lighted his pipe and began raving about her in a guarded undertone. It was one long rhapsody, broken only by ejaculations of despair whenever his present anguish pierced the web of memory.

But after changing trains at the junction, he took another text and his face turned hateful. There must be some man in question. Since it was not Hugh, it was some one else. Should not they twain, yoked so strangely by misfortune, conspire to find out that man and make an end of him ? Hugh strove to drown his whisper by loud remarks on any prominent feature of the landscape through which they were borne, lest other occupants of the compartment should hear the madman ; for mad he undoubtedly was for the time being.

Arrived at Elmondham, Hugh went to the post-office to gather any letters there might be for him, and also to send a message to his sister. That done, he made haste to rejoin Sidney, whom he had left seated in his carriage.

'She won't come back. It's killing me! And it isn't Mr. Calderon. She's refused him too. It's some one else we don't know of—never suspected. You know what she is to me—oh, my delight! I've nothing left but to kill myself. . . .'

Hugh, emerging from the post-office, was stupefied by these words. The wretch—the gibbering idiot—was confiding in his coachman! 'Drive home!' he said sternly, and Miles, who had not observed his approach, turned scarlet as he touched his hat. Sidney, without reference to the derogation of which he seemed quite unconscious, welcomed Hugh back and continued the same plaint in his ears.

It was market-day, and the narrow shady thoroughfare was dotted with people conversing in knots or walking slowly by the shop-windows. Many hats were lifted as the carriage passed, and faces peered from upper casements. To have the squire of Hamford at his side exalted Mr. Boyne in the eyes of all Elmondham.

Out on the upland where leaves stirred faintly, the lark's song fell like dew from heaven. The sky, a vast blue dome, held white clouds poised around the sun in glory, ordered like angels in an Assumption. Sidney's incoherent threnody was more discordant here than it had rung on the railway-journey, as drunkenness glares most in broad daylight, amid peaceful scenes. No sooner had the carriage drawn up at the White House than Hugh sprang out to warn a maid who appeared in the doorway.

'Your master is very unwell. I shall very likely stay here all night, so prepare a bedroom close to his.'

'Has anything happened to mistress, sir?'

'Not that I know of.'

Hugh found wine decanted in the dining-room and obliged Sidney to swallow two glassfuls. The prescription answered, for thereafter he ceased lamenting and thought of his duty as host, taking Calderon through the garden on a sorrowful pilgrimage to view favourite haunts of Enid. There was one tree in particular, to whose lowest branch a hammock

was slung, before which he stood a long while with twitching face and vague eyes.

At dinner, Sidney ate little but drank a lot of wine, which appeared to have a sobering rather than intoxicating influence. Afterwards Hugh managed to interest him in a game of chess.

‘Do you think she’ll ever relent? Will she ever come back again?’

‘I’m sure she will, after a bit, when she’s had time to think.’

‘God bless you, Calderon. You’re a true friend. It’s because you worship her too.’

He went to bed in a fairly calm state and, when Hugh met him again at breakfast, was quite sensible, though glum and despondent.

Having to keep an appointment with his agent in Elmondham, Hugh sent to the Hall for his horse and rode off about ten o’clock. In the town he called on Doctor Turner, reputed first of three medical practitioners the place boasted, and told him something of Mr. Boyne’s state. ‘He wants doctoring, I should say.’

Reflecting, the physician said: ‘I can’t get there before six o’clock, there’s so much illness about.’

‘Oh, I should think that’d do. I don’t know that there’s any great hurry,’ said Hugh.

‘Well, if I can get there earlier, I will,’ said the doctor, holding the door open for his visitor to go out; and having shut it, he returned to a patient whom he had all this time kept waiting.

Hugh went home to lunch and informed Joan of the queerness of poor Boyne; but his sister received the news stiffly, with a manner the counterpart of that with which Mrs. Glover had chilled him, the day before, at Easterwick station. She presently asked:

‘Where’s his wife?’

‘She’s lodging with some old servants at Easterwick.’

‘Where you were yesterday!’

'Yes,' said Hugh bluntly; 'and where Boyne was yesterday, and Mr. and Mrs. Glover—a whole crowd. Safety in numbers! You needn't go fancying anything, because there's nothing. It may please you to know that I got badly snubbed for intruding. . . . There's nothing like a prim, pious sister for thinking evil of that kind. It seems to hang about you, you smell sin everywhere.'

Joan said nothing, ignoring the sneer. About three o'clock she drove out in her carriage as usual on fine days, while Hugh went and lounged in his study, perusing certain papers to which his agent had that morning referred him.

In that occupation his sister found him on her return.

'Hugh, I've been to Elmondham!'

'Ah!' He assumed complete indifference, though he had noticed her bearing of mixed excitement and determination, and wondered what she had been at. 'I'll tell you plainly what I've done; having no wish to imitate your underhand ways. I've sent a telegram to that woman telling her to come at once, her husband is ill.'

'The allusion is not clear. "That woman," I think you said?' Hugh observed, frowning over his papers.

'Mrs. Boyne: don't be idiotic!'

Hugh sat back, lifting arms in a yawn. 'Silly little girl!' he said indulgently. 'But I believe you've done a sensible thing for once in your life. I ought to have thought of it myself.'

His sister retired, quite nonplussed by his suavity where she had looked for wrath; a little disappointed withal. He joined her at tea without a trace of abashment, with not the smallest symptom of the guilt she imputed to him, so that her faith in her own perspicacity was something shaken.

He was in his dressing-room before dinner, giving the last tweaks to his necktie, when she burst in on him. At the same moment he became aware of a stir in the house. 'Has Parker come? I'll be down in a jiffy,' he said without

turning, supposing that the agent, invited to dinner, had arrived. Then, seeing Joan's face in the glass, he swung round to face her.

'What's the matter?'

'You must come at once. Doctor Turner's in the hall. Mr. Boyne has killed himself! It's too awful. And his poor wife came and found them just as they were bringing the body indoors. Poor thing, poor thing! Oh, how I wish I'd never sent that telegram!'

In the twinkling of an eye Hugh slipped into his dress-coat. He ran across a carpeted landing and down the broad staircase. Parker the agent was standing with Dr. Turner in the middle of the hall. Hugh heard him mutter: 'It ruins that bit of property. The house'll be haunted, and no one'll take it for love or money.'

'How do you do, Mr. Calderon?' said the doctor with a little bow. 'I see you've heard the sad news. . . . I went to the White House, as I told you I would, shortly after six. The servant told me he was in the garden, and shut me in the drawing-room while she went in search of him. As you know, that room has a French window on to the garden. Presently the girl came tearing across the lawn, shrieking like a madwoman. I stepped out in time to catch her and make her guide me. He had hanged himself on the lower branch of a beech-tree with a piece of cord cut from a hammock which lay near. There was an overturned chair. Life had been extinct not more than an hour, I should say.

'It was a heart-breaking sight in the evening sunshine, with the birds all singing. . . . Worst of all, just as we were nearing the house with the corpse, who should appear in the drawing-room window but his poor wife, fresh from a journey. I tell you, sir, it was agony to me. Never a tear; only such a look as I have never seen in a human face before. Her coming just then was one of those unfortunate accidents.' . . . The good man blew his nose ostentatiously by way of finishing the sentence. . . . 'The inquest

will be some time to-morrow,' he added, after a pause of dead silence; 'and your evidence will undoubtedly be required. It's a blessing you came to me this morning. That little bit of testimony will prevent the verdict of deliberate suicide. The man was undoubtedly insane—always knew he was hysterical.'

He refused an invitation to stay to dinner on the ground of other patients to be visited.

At the dinner-table Mr. Parker discoursed of suicide, so as to increase the nausea already impairing the appetite of his host and hostess. He treated the case as a human phenomenon rather than a private calamity, cited recent instances in the neighbourhood—one, very similar, of a farmer at Bishop's Hilton who hanged himself one fine evening in his own barn; and ascribed the growing prevalence of self-murder, first to agricultural depression, secondly to a hermit-life such as the late Mr. Boyne had led. He only hoped they might get as good a tenant to replace him, but feared the painful occurrence would breed ghost-stories that would for ever militate against the house.

His chatter did some good by preventing Hugh and Joan from brooding on the personal aspect of the tragedy. Nevertheless they were both relieved, when he requested that his gig might be called.

When he had gone, Hugh flung himself into an arm-chair far from his sister and became lost in reverie. Joan presently stole up and perched on the arm of his chair. He patted one of her hands. 'Well, Joanie?' he said dreamily.

'Hugh, dear, I'm so sorry for what I've always thought about you and Mrs. Boyne. If there was anything, you are paying too dearly for it now. Oh, I do so pity you!'

'There was never anything. I may sometimes have had hopes, but that's neither here nor there. She never by word or look encouraged me: that I can swear.'

'And it's all over?—I mean the coldness, the misunderstanding between us all these months.'

'Yes, yes, dear. Say no more about it.'

For a space Joan remained lost in thought, her cheek laid to his. By and by she said, more than half to herself:

‘I should think she’d go into a sisterhood.’

‘What makes you say that?’ exclaimed Hugh in sudden concern.

‘Think, dear, of the blow it must be to her! She must see it’s her fault. Even if she had nothing to reproach herself with, she would think it her fault, any woman would.’

‘You’ve a rare talent for tormenting yourselves,’ said Hugh bitterly.

‘She will never marry again.’

‘What on earth is to prevent her, if she wants to?’

Joan pursed her lips, and shook her head very knowingly. It was all the answer she vouchsafed.

Hugh could see her drift but too clearly, and mentally gnashed teeth, execrating his luck. Of course this ghastly business was bound to act banefully on a woman’s nerves. The sentiment interwoven with diabolical art—his hanging himself on her favourite tree with the rope of her hammock, his death so soon after she had repulsed him. All was nicely calculated to tinge the whole of her after-life with remorse, to make of it one long religious observance in memory of the poor departed. He himself must be for ever hateful to her from association with the dark event. He saw no hope anywhere. Morbid sentiment ruled the world of women.

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE PATH TO RECOVERY

A VERDICT of 'suicide during temporary insanity,' brought in by the coroner's jury, countenanced Sidney's burial with the faithful in Hamford churchyard; though Enid remembering his sentimentality over a grassy mound at a cross-ways, fancied he would have chosen the traditional ignominy of self-murder. He had ever craved to be taken seriously.

The day after the funeral, his widow went back to Easterwick, leaving all arrangements to her father, with her own reasons for refusing at present his offer of rooms at Ditchley Abbey. The neighbourhood of Hamford gloomed on her imagination as an immense spectre-haunted graveyard; while the sea drew her by its free tossings, sinking anon to rest. Trees she hated, and few grew by the storm-swept shore. Martha was tender and discreet in sympathy; old Thomas attended her like a faithful dog. Best boon of all, she did not know her neighbours.

She read compassionate letters from friends and mere acquaintance; curiously, no word from Ruth. Aunt Eliza opened a kind heart to her niece in a letter which Enid read and re-read with gratitude. It afforded the warm comfort of a friendly bosom; it gave her tears. In addition to signed condolences, she received by post cuttings from newspapers scored in ink. Sidney's poems, unheeded so long as he lived, were now attracting laudatory notice. Genius was recognised in the light of a tragic end generally attributed to the despair of neglected genius. Paragraphs

stating this hypothesis of martyrdom by public indifference were lined and underlined by anonymous correspondents—ironically, she supposed, aware of being by some accounted his murderess.

Once or twice in each week Hermia would drive over to cheer her, and if the day was fine, they would walk together on the sea-beach or by the tidal river. On occasions when Mr. Glover accompanied his wife he never intruded on those rambles, holding it an axiom that a woman is best for a woman in adversity. He would spend his time in Tom Anthony's garden, or in patronising converse with the fisherfolk.

It was a twilight existence, sure to enervate if prolonged. Hermia's visits ranked as events great and exhausting. Enid grew languid, slow-moving.

On a fine afternoon she sat on the shingle with a book. It was very warm, and even there, on the confines of the land, there was a numbing buzz of insect life. Weary of reading, she all at once caught herself thinking of Hugh, wondering what had become of him, hoping he had not forgotten. She feared he would see her marred, their passages cancelled, love smoked out by the scandal. And yet she hoped.

But six weeks had dragged since Sidney's funeral; conscience blushed at the bent of her thoughts. Do what she would for their better employment, to her distress and confusion they kept reverting to Hugh.

The sun was sinking behind the high, shelving beach when she moved homeward. The sea wore the colour of a periwinkle-flower, freckled with amber gleams. The ripples were amber where they broke in lacy foam. An opal haze, blending earth and sky, softened the horizon.

She felt more hopeful than of late, and withal more guilty. It was pleasant to be no longer all of stone, to experience the faint flutter of hope like a stunned bird reviving. In extenuation, for the solace it gave her, she could plead the extreme unlikelihood that Mr. Calderon would

renew his advances. It was a melting thought, nothing more ; but that was a great deal in her frozen state.

It dismayed her, on regaining her lodgings, to find a strange lady hovering round the tea-table in indoor dress.

‘Don’t you know me, Miss Enid, dear? Have you forgotten Lottie? I heard of your trouble and would have flown to you at once, only I couldn’t get away till now.’

Enid grew warm with a pleasure that brought tears. Besides her father and Hermia, and kind, devout Aunt Eliza, there had been some one unsuspected in the world who cared what became of her, some one who did not look cold on her as a murderess. In a shaky voice she asked :

‘However did you track me here?’

‘Oh, I found out—never mind how! Through a friend.’

The little mystery in the answer reminded of Lottie’s irregularity, and withheld Enid from further questioning.

‘Whatever she’ve done, or ’ave been, or may be,’ ran Martha’s pronouncement on her new boarder, ‘I forgive ’er from the bottom of my ’art for comin’ to you in the time o’ trouble. I kissed her when I found out who she was and knew her errand, like as if she’d been my own flesh and blood, I did. She’s wishin’ to pay for ’erself, and she don’t paint nor yet powder by what I’ve seen. She can’t be out-and-out bad.’

Concern for Enid’s looks made Lottie insist on her taking her breakfast in bed every morning, and lying down every afternoon for an hour at least ; and Enid, though she laughed at the fuss, enjoyed the petting. In one of their intimate talks she said :

‘You know I was the cause of poor Sidney’s death. Some people think I drove him to it, but that’s only half true.’ She felt bound to make a confession which might substantially alter Lottie’s view of her. But the answer was impetuous :

‘People say, indeed! . . . It was Mr. Boyne’s nature. He was naturally hysterical, and I’ve heard there’s insanity

in his family. I know all about it and you're not much to blame.'

'Why, who told you?'

'A friend of yours—Mr. Calderon.'

'Who!'

Lottie flushed, laughing at first shyly, then in merriment.

'You mustn't question me! I'm your fairy godmother, and have all kinds of imps at my service.' And, at the image of Mr. Calderon as an imp, Enid laughed too, but she still kept wondering at Lottie's acquaintance with him and even felt a twinge of jealousy.

One day, when Hermia was expected, Enid fresh from her bath, was robing before her looking-glass when a man's growl came up to her from the garden, and Lottie's voice rose distinct in reply:

'Couldn't he bear it any longer, poor thing? And how's my other baby? You mustn't stop another minute! Your sister will be here in an hour, and she stops all day, so make yourself scarce till the evening, when I'll try and meet you. Good-bye till then!' Followed the smack of a kiss, and then Enid peeping over the muslin blind saw a familiar figure pass out at the gate and saunter to the inn across the green.

When Lottie shortly presented herself in her self-imposed character of tirewoman, she was met with a face stern from a sense of duty.

'I saw Lord Elmsdale leave the house just now. He kissed you and you talked of a baby!'

'I never dreamt you were out of bed, Miss,' said Lottie demurely, but with a rise of colour which proclaimed her guilty.

'Have you no respect for me, Lottie—for my delicate position—that you let the man visit you here? Every village is a hot-bed of scandal. I shall never hear the end of it.'

'Well,' said Lottie, upon short reflection, 'I had to tell Martha, so I'll tell you. Only promise not to breathe a hint

of it to another soul! I wouldn't have Mrs. Glover know for worlds—just yet.'

'Well?' said Enid, pending judgment.

'Dear, we're married! We've been married nearly two years.'

Enid stared, then suddenly hugged her friend with both arms and kissed her. A little afterwards both fell a-laughing very heartily—the kind of laugh which is as fresh air to clear blood and brain. To Enid the idea of Lottie and Hernia being sisters-in-law, of her father and Ruth implicated in the same tangle, shouted laughter.

'And you kept it dark even from me? How could you! There was I fearing the worst for you. . . . And you've been waiting on me just as you used to do. Why, dear, you're a viscountess, my social superior! It can't go on.'

'Do please keep it a dead secret!' Lottie entreated with clasped hands. 'I'm not ready yet. I've been training myself, trying to learn arts and graces. I don't wish the dear boy ever to be ashamed of me. . . . But oh, dear! I'm scared when I think of its getting known. I'm not half ready yet.'

'What nonsense! You have better manners than nine out of ten of the women you'll meet; and you're pretty enough to storm a dukedom.'

'I know I shall do all right with the men: it's the women I dread. I want to get Ralph back into his own class, into the very best set, to make him a real nobleman, respected. . . .'

'For your own sake?' Enid slyly suggested.

'No, for my son's,' said Lottie, colouring hotly; upon which Enid kissed her again. 'I only hope, dear, you will some day be as happy as we are. I know a man—the exact opposite of Ralph—who thinks of no one else.'

'Who, I should like to know?' said Enid, donning a rosy indifference.

'Mr. Calderon,' said Lottie, keeping sly watch on her

companion's face. 'Ralph brought him in to lunch one day at Lowestoft, and he stayed till six o'clock talking about you. I had to rack my brains to remember things you'd done and said. He played with his hands, I recollect, just as you're doing now.' Enid's hands flew apart. As much for a damper on her own heart as to stop Lottie, she said piteously: 'It's hardly two months since that awful thing happened.'

Lottie felt the rebuke; serious in a trice. 'My fear is,' she sighed, 'that Mrs. Glover may run up against that dear old silly before the day's out.'

It befell even as she had feared. Mrs. Glover, starting on her homeward drive in the cool of evening, met the scape-grace half-way up the village street just where the windmill, grey on the sunset, whirled great shadows across the road and over the faces of the confronting cottages. She stopped the carriage.

'Whatever are you doing here, Ralph?'

'Oh, I'm having a look round.' His lordship took his pipe from his mouth with an impudent offer to kiss her. On his coming within reach of a whisper she said:

'You're after that poor girl who has been so nice to Enid? You needn't deny it, sir. It's patent—barefaced—disgraceful! You're incorrigible! Just when the girl seems anxious to make a fresh start.'

'Ha? I didn't know that!' said his lordship, personating alarm. 'I've not done with her yet, thank ye kindly, marm! When I have I'll let you know. God bless you, you always were a good charitable soul!'

'Your jokes are singularly ill-timed!' said his sister tartly.

'Well then, I'll be as solemn as a judge.' He gave a novel, not to say owlish rendering of that high functionary. 'And I want to tell you that I'm a deuced innocent chap, and I won't have you putting ideas into my noddle.'

'Don't be such a fool, Elmsdale!' Hermia's scorn grew withering. 'I've a good mind never to speak to you. And

I warn you I shall talk to the girl and do my best to get her out of your clutches. Drive on, please !'

The carriage moved off with the two stiff immovable men on the box, and the agitated dame within. 'You might say good-bye to a fellow !' Lord Elmsdale bawled after her for the treat of seeing her toss her stately head in ineffable disdain.

Ere Mrs. Glover came again to Easterwick, her brother had transported his prey to an eyrie near London ; and Enid, in accordance with her promise, had to join Hermia in indignation and shaking of heads.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

HERMIA'S CONSCIENCE BECOMES TROUBLESOME FOR A TIME

SINCE coming to live at Ditchley Abbey it had been Simon Glover's ambition to be enrolled in the commission of the peace for his county, to sit on the bench at Petty Sessions, to have cockaded retainers. The shrievalty might lie beyond, but to gain sight of that higher peak the lesser must first be climbed. Now at last, in the November following poor Boyne's death, he found himself one dull morning possessor of the coveted prize; and it proved but a Dead Sea apple.

The news was conveyed in the letter which he opened second of the little stack of correspondence on his breakfast-table, the first perused had been from Hermia, absent in London on a visit to Lady Bethnal. After conning the official communication, he returned to the conjugal with the face of one stunned. It was as if a bosom friend had smitten him without warning or provocation.

Albeit floundering in a slough of despond, and at a loss how to emerge, hope was yet stubborn within him. There must be firm ground somewhere; a helping hand must be reached forth, if need were, from heaven. He relied on the off chance which shines to the sane among men as a star through the fog, and preserves from desperate courses.

Enid could have helped him now with advice had she only been at home instead of playing the recluse in a deadly dull village thirteen miles off. He reprehended that self-burial, that fasting from all joy, of a mere girl. He had never so fully perceived the unnaturalness, the horror of it, as now

that he had crying need for her. Enid dealt in the unheard-of, abounded in eccentricities of bad example. Without doubt it was that ridiculous bolt of hers, remembered in nervous illness, which had engendered this present aberration of Hermia.

‘What are you staring at?’ he turned sharply and demanded of the servant waiting on him. The man whose eyes had been riveted, all impersonally, on his master’s back started and, wheeling about, fell zealously to some imaginary business with the sideboard.

Old Simon looked once more at the letter, mauling his grey whiskers. The need for counsel towered imperative. With Enid absent, on whom could he lean? Calderon, perhaps! The transit of thought from Enid to Hamford Hall was almost a natural one, accomplished without effort, thanks to an old hope revived with her widowhood. Of late he had grown intimate with Calderon, to whom he was indebted for his recognition by the superior gentry. Calderon, being conversant with the story of Hermia, would need no painful explanation of details; and, though young, he was emphatically a man of resource, a tactician, accustomed to view life from the general’s standpoint. He resolved to consult Calderon.

In a state of neuralgic impatience he passed the interval between the ordering of the carriage and its announcement as ready. Even when ensconced therein, borne smoothly over mats of dead leaves soaked in autumnal mist, the conviction of activity did not suffice; he required the illusion also and shifted his seat perpetually, flinging himself from one corner to another. He saw trees, half-denuded, petrified in haze the colour of soap-suds, cottages with wet roofs imbedded in the same medium; anon, the marshes appeared absorbed in the spiritless half-light as in a sombre reverie. Mouthing ‘Ugh!’ at each variation of the prospect, he flung back from it with a groan.

The passage through park gates, and peeps of the grey front of a mansion as the carriage followed the trim curves

of a private road, recalled him to a strenuous grasp of the matter in hand. He strove to map out the interview. He expected solace in the mere disclosure, looking with confidence to the young man for aid of some kind.

Calderon was a splendid fellow, this old business man's ideal of the complete gentleman. If his daughter would only come forth from her solitude and look in the young man's face, he thought there was yet time to retrieve bygone errors. Old Simon had noticed points in Mr. Calderon's behaviour to himself of late which inclined him to believe that love had survived the scandal. And what a couple they would make, a match for one another in mental and physical development! What a property she would share! That his blood should flow on to remote ages in the veins of an old county family was a prospect delicious to him. But Enid was headstrong, mutinous; you could not count on her. Waywardness was the appendage of lovely daughters as thorn of rose, he admitted grudgingly, with a sigh.

Hugh Calderon was in act to mount his horse at the hall-door when the approach of the carriage gave him pause. Mr. Glover's agitation transpired even in the process of alighting. Hugh, perceiving it, reddened a little and, bidding a groom lead the horse up and down, ushered the caller to his study. An inroad of Enid's father at that hour was only less stirring than an apparition of Enid herself. It must relate to her, it boded news of her, and fear lest it might portend ill news dictated the question, 'Has anything happened?'—specific enough to the monomaniac, but striking the hearer as vague and trivial, a generality.

Old Glover pursed his lips and nodded meaningly. Hugh begged him to be seated, but he was not attending. Wrapped in the vast purpose of his visit, impervious to remarks not bearing on it, he remained upright, with a tendency to prowl from wall to wall.

'What's wrong with the world?' he flung out presently, beginning to pace up and down with hands behind him. 'Everything's against me this year, and it's not my fault,

sir—I can't see what I've done to be punished so. It's like a visitation, the Hand of Providence; but that's for transgressors, and I've always been regular—churchgoing, business, home-life and all, until this last.' He hung his head a moment, then gave forth defiantly: 'It must have been the devil brought that man from the dead to trouble us. We were all happy till that cropped up.

'Then came Enid's wrongheadedness, and that poor fellow's shocking end. It wasn't her fault, let 'em say what they like. It's all summed up in this, sir: He was a poet, and she's not a poet. It was like different nations and tongues. She couldn't understand him, nor he her; his ways didn't suit her, so she got away. We must make allowances, Mr. Calderon. She is but a girl after all, and she's wilful—been spoilt at home, I'm afraid. But she's a good girl, I thoroughly believe, and tender-hearted too. She gives a lot away in charity though she'll never let any one know; which I think wrong, for isn't it written "Let your light so shine before men"? But she'll do things her own way or not at all, and of course she makes a slip now and then; though as for saying she as good as murdered her husband. . . . Why, it's a lie, sir. Before God it's a lie: you and I know that!'

There was a hiatus due to lack of breath during which he brushed a hand across his forehead. Hugh, conjecturing that this half lachrymose review of Enid could but preface the announcement of some fresh disaster to her he loved, remained with set face, expectant.

'Well, on the top of all that, my wife—you know her story so I can spare myself the bitterness of going into it—my dear wife'—his voice quavered—'told me some time back that she expected—that there was a chance, you understand—some prospect—that there was some likelihood of our having a child.' After much stammering he succeeded in rounding the period. 'You are listening? Well, yesterday I let her go to her aunt, the Marchioness of Bethnal, for a few days. We parted real husband and wife,

you'd have vowed she was fond of me. And now—here's a letter—just look at it!—came this morning.'

While Hugh was employed in deciphering Hermia's missive, the old man commented on points in it as he remembered them: "'Living in sin'"—that's pretty strong, isn't it? The law couldn't help us, so we stayed as we were. To separate would have been much worse—a lifelong scandal. Besides I couldn't seriously contemplate the step. How could I consent to lose her? As well sign my own death-warrant. . . . "Child of her shame" too: there's another of her exaggerations. It's conscience gone mad, that's what I call it. Why, the Lord forgive us, I shouldn't be surprised after this if her conscience led her to seek out that beast and go back to him just because he's her lawful . . . It's too much!' He pressed hands to his forehead. 'I want advice. My dear sir, my dear Calderon, you've grown—I hope you won't think it a liberty—you've grown like a son to me.'

Hugh's cheeks were a trifle hot as he replied: 'I can't do much to help, I fear. But . . . aren't ladies subject to delusions when in that state of health? I've heard and read of strange cravings. Wouldn't it be wise to humour her? You ought, I think, to take feminine advice. Lady Bethnal's a very capable woman. I advise you to leave it all to her; just write and tell her of the craze'—Old Glover kept bewildered silence. As a result of deep emotion, ideas came thick and fast when he himself was speaking, but the answering words reached him lamely and by dribblets, as though from a distance—'Why not send Mrs. Boyne up to look after her?'

'Enid?—The very thing! . . . But no'—the old man frowned—'I couldn't ask so much of the marchioness. They're high and mighty in that family; and, you see, I've stood behind a counter, and the taint's on my girls too. They tolerate me as Hermia's husband, and that's all.'

'But Mrs. Boyne could go to her sister's?'

Simon Glover's frown accentuated. 'Ruth has behaved

very badly. I wouldn't tell this to every one, but you're like one of the family. She hasn't written to my poor pet since that awful evening last July—never wrote to condole, and when I reproached her with it, she played the prude about poor Enid's run to Easterwick. She didn't hold with such goings-on, forsaking of husbands; and she used a very cruel word; she said poor Sidney was hounded to death—a man she couldn't bear in his lifetime, but now he's a saint. . . . Nice between sisters, isn't it? And to think they used to climb up, one on each knee—here a flaxen mop, there a reddish one—of an evening when I got home from business! You'd have thought there was innocence to last for life.' He sighed, and his head dropped—'It's a bright idea, only I can't see how to manage it.'

Hugh considered. 'Well, I know Lady Bethnal pretty well, and I hear she took a fancy to Mrs. Boyne at your wedding. If you can trust my discretion and will empower me, I think I could arrange matters. I'll go up by the next train. You in the meanwhile must prepare Mrs. Boyne and start her off.'

'At once? You think it possible?'

'I can almost guarantee her welcome in Park Lane by dinner-time. Lady Bethnal is not the dragon you think her, sir. And in an extreme case like this, where there's illness, and the family honour's at stake, I anticipate no difficulty whatever.'

'God bless you, my dear boy—you must excuse the liberty, but I'm moved. You have taken a load off my mind. With Enid there to watch over her, I shall feel almost at ease. I'm going straight from here. The carriage shall take me to the station. If you are good enough to carry out your share of the contract, she'll be there to-night.' As Hugh escorted him out, he murmured half to himself: 'It wounds me about that living in sin; makes me feel guilty, as if I'm being punished for wrongdoing; whereas I'm innocent. If that dreadful man had not come back from the dead, there'd 've been nothing—we should

all be happy—I suppose I may remember you to poor Enid.'

'I must beg you not to mention my name.'

'Why not?'

'It might set her against the expedition if she knew I had a finger in it.'

'Now there I'm sure you're wrong! She has the deepest regard for you, I'm certain. . . . Well, as you like. Then I shan't mention you. She is a little ticklish to deal with, but not the Tartar her sister Ruth is.'

Enid looked anything but a Tartar when Hugh confronted her that same evening. She alighted from a hansom-cab with a single trunk on its roof just as he came down the steps of Lady Bethnal's house in Park Lane. The door had but just closed behind him. Recognition dawned on her through vague mists, and when it came was frigid, alarmed, anything but delighted.

'How do you do, Mrs. Boyne? I heard in the house that you were expected.' He turned to ring the bell and knock for her. 'I see you share my dislike of growlers. The one disadvantage of a hansom is that the driver's a fixture; he can't get down and make himself useful.'

'I detest fourwheelers, they're such snails, and they rattle so,' she said wearily.

The door opened, showing halls of light, and Hugh took leave of her. Her bow, though constrained, was not ungracious. He walked off with a delicious inkling that she was more shy than hostile—a conjecture which converted street-lamps into moons and stars, and turned the town at large to rolling cloud for the nonce.

Meanwhile Enid was warmly received by her hostess. Lady Bethnal was the type of woman called motherly, to be found and applauded in all ranks of life. Having put Enid at her ease, she chatted:

'Mr. Calderon has just left. We were talking about you. He's a great pet of mine. I knew his father too as a young man. Hugh's a dear good boy, with surprising strength of

character. . . . Here's the tea, my love. You must have a cup and then we'll dress.' Acting on a sudden impulse she kissed her guest, adding: 'It's a good thing you're in mourning (forgive me, pet!), or we should have the house full of sighing and young men to the detriment of our invalid. I suppose your father told you of her mania. It's too perverse—ridiculous. But, between ourselves, it will pass—it will pass! I've seen such cases before. They're as old, I suspect, as the first woman. In the meantime, my dear, I've got you and I mean to keep you till the roses bloom again.' To leave no doubt of the allusion, she patted her visitor's cheek.

Hermia beheld Enid with great gladness. She was not slow to inform her of the lately-revealed duty to return to her unmentionable husband; and Enid, prompted by a sign from Lady Bethnal, agreed with all she said.

'Don't worry yourself, dear, until you're well again,' said her aunt comfortably. 'Then we'll find him out and you shall go to him since you feel it your duty. I'm having inquiries made.'

'And the child? Poor little thing!' wailed Hermia.

Lady Bethnal's grey eyes twinkled under discreet lids as she rejoined: 'You couldn't take your husband another man's child as a peace-offering—hardly!'

'No, I suppose not. Simon must keep it. Poor Simon! How I wish I could spare him all this pain.'

'My dear niece, you can't hand the poor man a sucking child; just "Take it, sir!" and no directions or anything. It'd be too bad!' said Lady Bethnal; and Enid blushed, it being her initiation in these feminine arcana.

Since her bereavement she had heard from her father that Ruth was in the same plight with Hermia, and had been cut to the quick at being left to hear such tidings from a third person. Fain would she have had Ruth fall on her neck, have petted and made much of her. The neglect rankled deeply, and it was with feelings of more than surprise that she one afternoon received a visit from

her cruel sister, and found herself the object of that sister's deepest commiseration. Ruth had adopted a new languor; she referred to her state of health in excuse of shortcomings as a correspondent. Her concern on Hermia's account was bounded in scope by the question of boy or girl. In the former case, she hinted, it would be only fair to bear in mind the doubt as to legitimacy, as otherwise they would be dispossessed, and unlawfully, of much of their fortune. It would be time enough to dispute the inheritance when their father's death should raise the question. Thus he would not be worried.

Enid knew not what to make of this visit, and the sudden change of front it exhibited, until Lady Bethnal happened to enter the room. Then she understood that the wing of the marchioness extended over her was her redemption in Ruth's eyes.

One evening in January, Enid and her father sat together in the drawing-room of the house in Park Lane, old Simon holding his daughter's hand, in silence save for the noise of passing vehicles.

By and by Lady Bethnal came down to them as one relieved of long anxiety.

'A boy,' she said quietly. 'And the doctor assures me they are both likely to do well.'

Old Simon emitting a sob, Lady Bethnal laid her hand on his shoulder and gave it a little shake.

'Now I know you're thinking of all the nonsense she has talked, poor soul, during her illness. That's all over now. It's not fair of you to remember.'

'But the child—my son—is illegitimate. We three know that. Suppose the man were to come back now!'

'Stuff and nonsense!' said her ladyship stontly. 'I've had a regular inquiry made about the man Garland. Inquiries ought to have been made years ago at the time of his elopement with Hermia; I don't know why they weren't, except that every one was too flabbergasted. . . . Well, we've tracked him to his native village. He was

married there at the age of twenty to a woman, much his senior, who is yet living, though she hasn't seen him for years, and is, in fact, comfortably settled with some one else—a most respectable couple, according to my informant. So, you see, things balance: it's all symmetrical.'

'Why didn't you tell me before? Why didn't you tell her?' said Simon hoarsely.

'I only had the particulars yesterday. And I wasn't going to tell her then, nor you either. I haven't even told her the news about that ridiculous Elmsdale. . . . But it is true, and you shall have all the facts and dates as sent to me.'

'Won't you tell her now?'

'No, I shall not,' said Lady Bethnal with a crushing resumption of the marchioness; and she sailed out of the room.

CHAPTER XXXIX

CHRISTMAS HEAVILAND TURNS HIS COAT

A TRUMPET so long awaited that expectancy has become a normal condition, startles the listener when it sounds at last. Chris Heaviland had grown used to inquiring Lord Elmsdale's address, and bragging of how he would hector the villain when waiting on him in the dual quality of chivalrous champion and scriptural avenger. But when the desired information fell casually from the lips of a mounted servant from the Abbey, with whom in the dinner-rest he conversed over the hedge of a field he was ploughing, it disconcerted him greatly.

He acted on it, however, of necessity, being walled off from retracting by the jeers of his native village. But he now kept his own counsel, simply asking at the farm for two days' leave of absence, which he obtained at the price of a small forfeiture of wages.

From the window of a third-class smoking compartment, he watched dun fallows, grey meads and hairy woods recede beneath a curdled sky. Creamy sunlight warmed his cheek through the pane. It was the wide world, unknown. To stem his oozing courage, it was necessary to think back to Ditchley and all that was there expected of him.

London was a turmoil, a vortex in which he was caught and whirled, quite submerged for a time. He sought guidance of the passers-by, but these were of the whirl. A curt word and they were gone. He saw mankind lashing as a torrent in the clefts of high dark buildings, where pigeons fluttered overhead, with brief flashes of iris, a

thought of home. At length he found one stationary under interrogations, a policeman posted at a street-corner, who vouchsafed full directions in a tone half-distrustful, half-compassionate. He crossed a bridge, the shuttlecock of other wayfarers, to find himself at length in a second great terminus, home of shrill whistles and the hiss of steam. Under guidance of an official he bought a ticket, and next, by the same protection, got into a train, which started almost immediately.

There was no end to the houses. He was beginning to recover from his stupor in so far as to marvel at their continuity when 'Wimbledon' was shouted, and, after sheepish inquiry of a fellow-traveller, a lady, he got out and slouched towards the exit. The neatness of every one he saw, the patter of feet so light compared with the creak and clump of his own clodhopping boots, made him feel uncouth, a gorilla among men.

Still it was all houses, though here lurked no roar to deafen him and he could hear notes of birds in the small gardens.

He strode aimless for a while, of set purpose to give his courage time to rise.

The face of a real country inn, set in leafless trees at the junction-point of two avenues, smiled to him. The sign of the Fox and Goose appeared to him a good sign. He pushed open a swing-door and found himself in a sanded taproom with settles and a deep wainscot, home from home. With a shamefaced Good-day to a small, neat-whiskered man clad in grey coat and riding-breeches, a grey cap set back on his head, Christmas rapped a table with an ash-sapling he had himself rooted up and trimmed for a walking-stick. He mentioned gin and bitter in a tone so gruff as to suggest wrongs.

'From the country—eh?' asked the neat-whiskered man looking up from a blush-coloured newspaper.

Chris wagged his head solemnly.

'What part?

‘Ditchley.’

‘Don’t know it.’

‘’Tis a tidy step off this.’

‘On business—eh?’

Chris wagged his head again, swallowed the contents of his mug at one fell gulp, then said with a sphinx-like smile : ‘Now I’ll lay yow ’ont never guess what mander o’ business ’tis which bring me to these parts.’

As a man with no interest in the game flings down a card at random, so the other proffered : ‘Eggs.’

‘No. Try again!’

‘Pigs?’

A shake of the head.

‘Something to do with cattle—or garden-stuff—or manure?’ The grey-suited one stretched arms and yawned capaciously.

‘Wrong every time! Yow ’ont never guess, not by yerself, so I’ll tell ye. ’Tis a lord I’m arter.’

‘Eh?’ cried the other in a tone of slightly awakened interest. ‘Are yer buyin’ or sellin’ one?’

Chris frowned his disapproval of such levity. ‘’Tis a sarious job, I say. I got to gie it un straight when I find un. I hates the whole lot on ’em. They didn’t ought to be let to be, that’s my opinion.’

‘D’y’ ear that, Mr. Pipes?’ said the grey-coated one to the landlord, who entered with a fresh measure of gin and bitter Chris had ordered. ‘You ’ave the honour to serve a socialist, a lord-’ater, with gin and bitter.’

‘Bless me,’ was the grinning response. ‘Why, what’ve you got against their noble lordships—eh?’

‘What good dew they dew on this here mortal ’arth—yow tell me that together!’ said Chris defiantly.

The horsey man winked aside to mine host. ‘Ah, there you ’ave us!’

‘They spend money,’ said the innkeeper, giving back the wink. ‘There’s the old sayin’, “tight as a lord.” We can’t complain of ’em in my profession. They benefit trade. And you’d best mind what you say, young man,

for this gentleman 'ere's like one of 'em, as you might say.'

The grey-coated man folded his arms majestically, then unfolded them to fall a-sniggering. 'See 'ow he looks at me—fit to do me a mischief!' he cried. 'Socialist!—why, you're a bloomin' anarchist—nothink less! You'd 'sassinate me for two pins, I can see in yer eye. So I'll just tell yer, to save bloodshed, I'm not a lord myself, not yet, but I'm groom to one.'

Perceiving that they made a mock of him, Christmas took refuge in dignified silence while he finished his drink, taking time over it to show them he was at ease. On his sallying forth at length, a gentleman kindly gave him directions, following which he in course of time found a house standing in its own grounds, with a well-grown cedar shadowing the lawn before it. The drive described a semi-circle from gate to gate. The fact that there were two gates was disconcerting, suggesting a right and a wrong one. He pushed in resolutely, however, though his heart thumped his ribs, and he had to stand a minute just within the compound to mop his brow.

A drum beat loud in each ear. The windows of the red-brick mansion transfixed him with a cold stare. Possessed though he was with a craven longing to turn tail and flee, his legs still bore him on, as a machine wound up to a certain purpose, over which he had lost control. The sound of his own knock on the white door struck panic, and he shrank within himself, the mind seeking protection of the body.

A bottle-nosed servitor showed disgust of his appearance, snorted at his accent when he spoke, and sniffed at his plea of urgent business. Impressions of a purplish protuberance between small eyes surmounting a white cuirass, remained with Chris of this person, who shut the door on him, but presently reopened it to say that his lordship could spare a minute.

Christmas, who had been inwardly praying for non-

admittance, was introduced into a spacious hall furnished like a parlour, and at once became painfully conscious of boots at which the butler glanced amazement. The softness of the mats was something awful, mysterious, religious for a man accustomed to rouse echoes where he trod, He was standing in the centre of a rug of deep pile, shifting from one foot to the other and twiddling his hat when a gentleman of cheerful countenance approached him.

‘Well, my man, what can I do for you?’

Chris dropped his eyes and inclined his flaming face in contemplation of the brim of his hat held between a thumb and forefinger.

Hearing his own voice as the Riot Act above a tumult, his brain singing, the floor behaving like a tumbled sea, he said doggedly: ‘I come consarnin’ my sister. Gen there been marriage, there’ll be marriage-lines, leastways some account kep’. And father ha’ the right to see that, and failin’ father ’tis me. Us Heavilands ha’ got ta blew blood, so ’tis said. Howsever that be, we got our parcel o’ pride same as others.’

‘And suppose there has been no marriage—what then?’

‘Well then, sir—my lord, I should ha’ said—there’s got to be, else I’ll gie ye a hidin’; I come here o’ parpose.’ The speech was deprived of truculency by the shamefaced demeanour of the speaker. Feeling that he had failed miserably, had insulted without cowing the gentleman, Chris dwindled to a speck in his own estimation.

‘I like that! . . . In my own house! . . . Well, come in here.’

Chris was aware of the gentleman laughing very heartily, as he led him into a room wherein were books and riding-gear, and a dog which thudded with its tail upon the hearth-stone.

The gentleman took down a red-bound volume from a shelf. ‘Here, can you read?’

‘Only print, sir—my lord.’

‘Well, this is print. Read that!’

His lordship passed the book, marking a place with his thumb. '*Elmsdale*—Ralph Farlow Thaneson, fifth viscount . . . married (18) Charlotte Ellen, only daughter of W. Heaviland, Esqre., of Ditchley . . .'

With fallen jaw Chris sat staring at the printed page, till his lordship asked: 'Are you satisfied?'

'What's this here book?'

'The peerage.'

'Never heard on 't. 'Tain't a marriage-lines?'

'It's as good.'

'Well, what's the meaning o' what's wrote here—"Es-quire"? Yow know as well as I dew as her father's but a labourin' man.'

'Oh, that's all right. It's a custom. Are you satisfied?'

'May I take this here book along wi' me, and shew to father and all sich as ha' spoke agen her?'

'No!' was the appalled answer. 'Don't make a fuss—whatever you do—for your sister's sake. Tell your father the truth in confidence, and every one else that she's married and well-to-do. That's enough!'

Chris grew sullen. His mouth turned mulish and he was just going to buck at the proffered curb when the door flew open and a dainty lady entered pink-checked from an airing. A close habit sheathed her lissome figure, she wore a little billycock hat from under which her fair hair strayed like a warm cloud melting into air, and she carried a hunting-crop.

'O Ralph, I'm sorry! I had no idea you were busy.' Past the threshold she halted, with a fleeting grimace at the visitor.

Chris had begun to feel at ease with the gentleman; the lady plunged him over head and ears in abashment. His peccant boots filled all the room. Feeling a trespasser, he stood up awkwardly.

'Here is your sister,' said Lord Elmsdale. 'She will explain things to you.'

'O Chris, is that you?' Lottie came forward dis-

interestedly, conceding her hand. She did not seem over-pleased to see him, and he, on his side, could only wish that he had left well alone.

‘Well, I’m sure I’m glad ye’re happy and respectable,’ he murmured.

Lottie dealt him a look which shrivelled his brain.

‘I don’t know what you mean,’ she said languidly. ‘My only unhappiness has arisen from the conduct of a certain busybody . . . Well, since you are here, I suppose you must stay to lunch. I came to tell you it was ready, Ralph. Come along! I shan’t change; it’s too late.’ Chris would have demurred, but his tongue stuck to the roof of his mouth. ‘He’s better with us than with the servants,’ she found time to breathe in her husband’s ear as they passed to the dining-room. Who knows what he’d let out! And with us he’ll feel the difference.’

Whatever Chris might have said or done if relegated to the servants’ table, he was tongue-tied in the dining-room. He felt his sister’s eye upon him with a paralysing influence. He strove to observe her way of manipulating knife and fork, and to copy it, but failed signally. Once he dropped his knife, and, picking it up, would have wiped it on his sleeve had not the outraged butler snatched it away and brought another. He upset a glass of ale with his elbow, when his sister’s little cough of irritation annihilated him, though Lord Elmsdale muttered good-naturedly: ‘Never mind! I do it myself—often. An accident!’

Only when left alone with the friendly nobleman, who strove to atone for Lottie’s harshness by plying him with good wine, did he recover wit enough to speak connectedly. Pride of his sister’s elevation welled up in volume to drown even self-consciousness, the butler having withdrawn.

‘I’m truly thankful, I’m sure; and so’ll be father when I tell un. ’Tis more’n we could ha’ ventured to arst. But there’s One above, as the sayin’ is’—the warmth of the wine suffused him—‘what’ll repay ye a hundredfold, I make no doubt.’

‘Gammon!’ said his host lightly. ‘She’s a splendid girl—a thundering little brick——’ His lordship strained for some epithet more utterly expressive of her, and, finding none, fell down to, ‘Upon my soul, I couldn’t have married any one else. She’s just built for me.’

After stifling emotion by sundry dry gulps and a final draught of wine, he went on to ask:

‘But how about that hiding you were going to give me? You came on purpose, remember, and I should be sorry to disappoint you. Can you box?’

Chris turned the colour of sliced beetroot. ‘You be main hard on me, m’ lord; but that sarve me right for the fool I ha’ been. I wish to express to ye as how I ’ont tell no one, not at Ditchley nor yet elsewhere, savin’ father and mother alone. When she ha’ pulled herself up so high, ’twould be sin for us to drag on her, bein’ as we be glorified likewise by her betterin’ of herself. That shan’t get about.’

‘You promise that?’ Lord Elmsdale held out his hand, which Chris grasped with maudlin fervour.

‘She ha’ bettered herself to that extent,’ he wept, ‘as it ain’t hardly to be b’lieved; and I’ll try—me and father’ll try . . . if so be . . . what we can . . .’ Losing the train of ideas, he produced a red handkerchief with white spots and therewith wiped his eyes.

‘We must see if we can’t give you a leg-up,’ said Lord Elmsdale cheerily: and he put some shrewd questions relative to farming around Ditchley.

Christmas left the house without again seeing Lottie, and in an elation of partial drunkenness, wherein movement is effortless and set to music, strode down the drive and out at the gate. A little way down the avenue stood a red pillar-post in the filigree of light and shadow cast by a pale sun through leafless twigs. A figure lurked beside it, cloaked and hooded, monk-like in the distance. Down the whole reach of road there was no other human being save an errand-boy whistling afar off.

‘O Chris, dear, forgive me! It was only a lesson I was

reading you. You mustn't visit us ; it would never do. I'll come and see you at home sometimes. I often think of the old life. Kiss father and mother from me, and say there's a little grandson I'll show them one of these days. . . . Good-bye, dear ! Good-bye !'

She flitted homeward, while Christmas, her kiss warm on his cheek, mooned onward in a world of song. It had wanted but that squeeze of the hand, that kiss, to complete his rapture. There was nothing like the nobility !

The sign of the Fox and Goose again presenting itself, he felt it an occasion when expense might be blowed. In the tap-room he called for whisky. Gin and bitter had met his morning's requirement, but the day had since turned festive, and the brother of a viscountess should be noble even in drink. Several men were in the room, and all faces turned on him when the barman said :

'Well, 'ad any sport ? Did you manage to pot one or two ? 'Ere you 'ave a socialist, gentlemen—a anarchist, you might say. He's been out huntin' lords, with this 'ere swagger stick of 'is.' He held up the ash-sapling for inspection.

Christmas bore with the laughter. Lights and music flooding every nook of his being, there was no scrap of gloom in which dudgeon might lurk. Nevertheless he felt the call for a manifesto embodying his changed views.

''Twer' all a joke this mornin', I tell ye. Wa, partner, 'tain't likely I should hate the nobility, come to think as my sister be married to one on 'em—a viscount, live not a mile from here.'

The groom who had chaffed him on the previous occasion, whose presence he had not descried, now stood up in a corner and appealed to the sense of the gathering.

'Now look 'ere ! Is this to be stood ? My missis, Viscountess Elmsdale, is the only viscountess hereabouts ; and 'im—you see what 'e is. Well, sec 'er ; she's the real lady every inch, and as pretty, dainty a bit o' goods ! . . . See 'er come trippin' down the steps to 'er 'oss, 'oldin' 'er skirt up

o' one side, showin' little feet—real noble feet. You may be took in with a face or voice even, but feet and ankles don't deceive yer. They marks the breed. Why, I declare, many a time when I've 'anded 'er down, if I couldn't wish myself a doorstep for 'er to walk on me! . . . Well, she's the daughter o' W. 'Eaviland, Esquire, one o' the grandest gentlemen in the land; you may guess what 'e is by what she is; I've read about him in the great red book o' the lords of England. . . . And 'ere's this young chawbacon claims to be 'er brother. Is it to be stood, I ask yer?' He sat down, leaving judgment to the company.

The discursive length of the groom's harangue had given Chris time to realise the slip he had made, how he had, all unwittingly, broken his pledged word. To retrieve the blunder he would have given his right hand. To lie seemed the least he could do in atonement.

'Yow got hold o' the wrong end, governor. I said not as she was my sister, but as she was like my sister. Well, I may say that, masters, for I played with her when a little gel, and my mother nussed her. My foster-sister, that's what she be.'

'You said your sister, I 'eard yer. . . . It's all very well for you to say now as you didn't,' his opponent insisted; then, pointing derision, 'Fancy 'im descended from W. 'Eaviland, Esquire!'

'No, no, yow mistook, sir. My foster-sister, that's hew she be. Come to that, I ha' knowed her all my life, and she fare kind o' 'tached to me for the sake o' old times.' Chris stood up to depart. 'Gentlemen, I ha' wrought for W. Heaviland, Esquire, all my life, and I'm the last as 'd prate agen him, for a better gen'l'm'n nor a grander don't tread this here mortal arth. I can't say no fairer!'

'I'm glad you made a clean breast of it,' said the groom to clinch his triumph. 'But mind your tongue in future. Don't you go takin' the names o' nobilities in vain. Why, I declare, when he said she was his sister, if I couldn't 've murdered the liar! Me to serve the sister of a clodhopper!'

Greatly sobered, Chris came forth into the lilac mist of a January evening, and found his way to the railway station. A night spent perforce at a fifth-rate hotel near Liverpool Street terminus completed his sobriety. The whistle and rumble of trains through the night prevented slumber, and when day dawned at last, on his long watch, he found tardy relief in the reflection that his travelling days were well-nigh over.

CHAPTER XL

A FOREGONE CONCLUSION

‘I CANNOT consent to meet the woman; how can you ask it? A cottage girl, my sister’s maid, to take precedence of me!’ It was Ruth, speaking and with venomous disdain, for she had come to Ditchley at the end of August without an inkling that she would encounter Lady Elmsdale. The ignominy was sprung upon her on this night of her arrival, and she saw a vile plot to degrade her.

‘She takes precedence of me also,’ said her stepmother suavely. Insolently Ruth replied: ‘Oh, it’s different for you, the kind of thing’s in your family; but it seems a little hard that we innocent people should have to suffer for your eccentricities.’

It was a remark that played on Hermia like lightning. But she was quite unmoved.

‘Kenneth, we must go back to-morrow morning!’ Ruth called out. Captain Stoke who, in conjunction with Simon Glover, Hugh Calderon, and the vicar of Ditchley, was solemnising whist, looked up and asked: ‘What’s that?’

‘I say we must leave here to-morrow, unless you particularly wish me to associate with a woman who was once my sister’s maid.’

Hugh Calderon’s mouth twitched and his eyes sought Enid who was sitting aloof in a discussion with Mrs. Freely about a clothing-club. The master of the house frowned at his strident daughter, the rubber being a kind of religious service in his opinion. Mr. Freely grinned at his hand, and Kenneth said: ‘Don’t interrupt now, dear. I’ll talk to you after this game.’

‘I suppose you’ll be having her father and mother here to dinner, and that shocking, red-faced, bull-necked creature, her brother, who attacked poor papa at my wedding.’ Since her father’s second marriage Ruth had contracted a habit of saying ‘poor papa’ calculated to rile her stepmother.

‘I had not thought of it,’ said Hermia languidly; ‘but no doubt Lottie will like to see something of her people, and nurse can take the baby sometimes to the cottage.’

‘Are we the only people asked to stay in the house with her? It really seems rather uncomplimentary, as if we were something like——’

‘Lady Bethnal is coming with the Elmsdales. She has appointed herself chaperone to my sister-in-law who needs, of course, a godmother in society. She has taken a fancy to her.’

Ruth sulked. When Kenneth came to inquire the cause of that shriek which had disturbed the whist-players, she shrugged her shoulders pettishly. ‘Oh, it’s nothing. I suppose we may as well stop on since every one seems to be taking her up. But it’s pretty sickening—one of our own servants!’ It was very galling, but would have been more so without the titles.

If Ruth was disgusted to meet Lottie, Lottie was perfectly terror-stricken at sight of Ruth, who extended her hand with crushing condescension. Lady Elmsdale touched the stiff fingers shyly and escaped to the side of her doughty chaperone, whence she could consider and even criticise Ruth’s dress and appearance without feelings of annihilation. Captain Stoke was scrupulously polite to her. Simon Glover hemmed and hawed from a wish to seem cordial, going out of his way to felicitate Lord Elmsdale, whose demeanour was in the last degree sheepish, on his selection of so charming a partner. Just before dinner, Enid came to her room with,

‘Well, how do you feel?’

‘Very queer indeed—you may imagine—in this house!’

‘You’re looking sweet! What a pretty dress!’ It was Mrs. Boyne’s way of infusing confidence.

‘Captain and Mrs. Stoke are against me.’

‘Oh, Ruth is odd; you know she always was. But Kenneth’s all right, though he’s rather a finick. How about Hermia?’

‘Oh, how I like her! She’s all kindness. And, you see we’ve a common ground in the nursery.’

It was a distinct boon to Lottie to find Mr. Calderon in the drawing-room when she appeared there with Enid. He left off talking to her husband and hastened to meet her as an old friend. Enid was glad for her sake. Hugh took Lady Elmsdale in to dinner. From where Enid sat she could see them talking earnestly together, and from the direction Lottie’s eyes kept taking had little doubt but that she herself was the topic.

Though Hugh moved warily, and without demonstration of any kind whatsoever, she had for a month past known that he was deliberately trying to enmesh her. Miss Calderon had been five times to see her, and had been at home when she called in return. His sister did not like her, would certainly never have gone out of her way to be civil to her; therefore stress had been put upon her. She had ascertained from divers shrewd reminders of ‘this time last year,’ that Joan thought her inhuman and was shocked at betrayals of gaiety in a suicide’s widow. But she also knew that Hugh thought otherwise, and that every time she smiled his hope leapt up to choke him. It may have been for that reason she never moped in his presence. But gay and agreeable as she might be, he never, by word or look, overstepped the boundary of polite acquaintance.

Lottie took her to task one day, in Lady Bethnal’s hearing, for her coldness to a man who idolised her.

‘Cold!’ she cried. ‘He’s dense!’

‘May I tell him that?’

‘No! For Heaven’s—for my sake, Lottie!’ Mrs. Boyne was reduced in a second to abject supplication.

Lady Bethnal, bowed over fancy-work, had her word to say:

‘If you care for him, my dear, I think you might, without derogation, venture on a little clearer encouragement.’ She was evidently in the gentleman’s confidence. ‘He says he’s not sure enough of his ground to venture, and I tell him he’s a goose. But apparently you’ve snubbed him more than once; and you know the proverb about people “once bit.”’

‘So you’re all in a conspiracy!’ cried Enid, pretending to stop her ears. ‘I—I’m not sure that I’m quite ready—yet.’

‘Well, my dear, take your own time. I have no wish and no right to hustle you,’ said Lady Bethnal laughing.

‘Well—well . . .’ With one hand to her hair Enid looked round about her a little wildly, in a posture slightly suggestive of Bacchanalian abandonment. ‘You can tell him—either of you—that I’m tired of his persecution; that I am going to fly from his snares away to my old nest at Easterwick—I shall go to-morrow—no, next week. . . . You can tell him that, with my love—no, “compliments” is more proper.’

‘May I go with you?’ said Lottie. ‘I can be spared, I dare say, for two days; and it won’t take more if he’s properly coached, and I’ll take care that he is.’

‘But, my love, why go off like that?’ began Lady Bethnal, till, meeting two pairs of laughing eyes, she smiled and said: ‘I’m afraid I’m rather dull. Is it a game of follow-my-leader? Fie, girls, that’s scarcely proper!’

Said Enid: ‘I see a certain fitness in it. I couldn’t stand a charade courtship, scene a drawing-room or a trim lawn, considering all that has gone before.’

Lady Bethnal presently went out to fetch some silk of a certain colour required by her embroidery, when Enid sighed:

‘If he had only been the first!’

‘You’d have led him a life!’ said Lottie maliciously.

‘Oh, don’t please say that!’

‘I believe it’s true. You were bound to rebel against

number one, whoever he might have been, you so hate to be saddled. Number two stands a better chance, but still I think him a bold man, after all he must have observed, unless he's blind in love.'

'You think me a tigress!'

'I know you can be! There's where his boldness comes in.'

Enid hung her head, then lifted it proudly. 'It's very kind of him, I'm sure, to play Petruchio!'

The allusion was lost on Lottie, who said simply: 'You needn't bridle up. What I should call your bad points he singles out for admiration. He's as blind as a bat, or a great philosopher.' She laughed.

'I've been awfully selfish, I know,' murmured Enid after a thoughtful pause, with head bent.

Five days later she set out from Martha's cottage at Easterwick with a magazine under her arm, in the most careless manner.

'Don't forget to go Blythmouth way!' cried Lady Elmsdale, waving her hand from the porch.

Enid turned a very rosy face, with 'Don't make it so cold-blooded and criminal, you little cat!'

She crossed the ferry, and walked along the beach-road slowly, fluttering the leaves of her book, thinking the while with indignation: 'Fancy his insisting on my meeting him half-way. It seems he must have me humble, quite tame in his hand. But I'm not, I won't be! It'd serve him right if I turned back, as I shall presently.'

But that 'presently' was long deferred. Not until she had recognised Hugh Calderon's approaching figure, and was sure he had espied her, did she face about and stroll leisurely back towards Easterwick. The huts of the river-bank, black walls and ochre roofs, danced before her in a low landscape a-ripple with heat and sunlight.

'Good afternoon!'

'Er—good afternoon'—she turned sharply and caught him hat in hand—'Mr. Calderon,' she added, as if on recog-

niton. 'Isn't it sultry? It's going to thunder; look at that cloud coming up behind the lighthouse!'

She moved towards Blythmouth along the way he had come, and he moved with her, tongue-tied, until he saw her shoulders tremble, and knew she must be either laughing or crying, when he uttered 'Enid!'

Her simple response, 'Yes, Hugh!' stopped a rush of words. He stood dumfounded, knowing not how to take her behaviour, when, disclosing a radiant face, she forcibly possessed herself of his arm. Pressing the captured member to her side—

'It's unconventional,' she said, 'but true.'

For long they paced the beach-road, careless what any one might deduce from their proximity, in a rainbow of spent sorrow and conquering joy. A painter at his easel amid the rank shore-grass kept an eye on them, admiring Enid who looked now at her feet, now at her companion, with blushes and pallors racing across her face like lights and shadows on an April day.

Lady Elmsdale, watching at the cottage window, spied them afar off, coming without haste, though a storm-cloud threatened. It amused her to see Hugh all unconsciously carrying Enid's gloves as if they were something priceless.

On the doorstep Hugh stood to take leave, when Lottie said merrily:

'Oh, you may come in if you like, sir, and have tea with us. There's plenty of time till the last train.'

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